This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 06820239 3

AUCTOR PRETIOSA FACIT
Robert Lenox
NEW YORK.

AN IMPARTIAL AND SUCCINCT

HISTORY

OF THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST.

The Revd. T. Haweis L.L.B. & M.D.

RECTOR OF All Saints Aldwincle NORTHAMPTONS.

And Chaplain to the late Countess of Huntingdon.

London, Publd as the Act directs Jany 2. 1800.

AN IMPARTIAL AND SUCCINCT

HISTORY

OF THE

RISE, DECLENSION, AND REVIVAL

OF THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST;

FROM

THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOUR

TO

THE PRESENT TIME.

WITH

FAITHFUL CHARACTERS OF THE PRINCIPAL PERSONAGES, ANCIENT AND MODERN.

BY THE

REV. T. HAWEIS, LL. B. & M. D.

Chaplain to the late Countess of Huntingdon, and Rector of All Saints, Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:

PRINTED FOR J. MAWMAN, (Successor to MR. DILLY,)

IN THE POULTRY;

SOLD ALSO BY T. CHAPMAN, FLEET-STREET.

M DCC.

T. Gillet, Printer, Salisbury-Square.

AN IMPARTIAL AND SUCCINCT

HISTORY

OF THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST.

The Revd. J. Hanes L.L.B. & M.D.

RECTOR OF All Saints Aldwincle NORTHAMPTONS.

And Chaplain to the late Countess of Huntingdon.

London, Publd as the Act directs Jany 2. 1800.

AN IMPARTIAL AND SUCCINCT

HISTORY

OF THE

RISE, DECLENSION, AND REVIVAL

OF THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST;

FROM

THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOUR

TO

THE PRESENT TIME.

WITH

FAITHFUL CHARACTERS OF THE PRINCIPAL PERSONAGES, ANCIENT AND MODERN.

BY THE

REV. T. HAWEIS, LL. B. & M. D.
Chaplain to the late Countess of Huntingdon, and Rector of All Saints, Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:
PRINTED FOR J. MAWMAN, (Successor to MR. DILLY,)
IN THE POULTRY;
SOLD ALSO BY T. CHAPMAN, FLEET-STREET.
M DCC.

T. Gillet, Printer, Salisbury-Square.

LENOX LIBRARY
NEW YORK

To JOSEPH HARDCASTLE, Esq.

TREASURER,

And all the DIRECTORS *and* GOVERNORS *of the*

MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

BRETHREN,

TO whoſe patronage can I ſo properly commend theſe volumes, as to you, who have encouraged me in the work, and ſuppoſed it might conduce to promote the great objects we have in view. We have been earneſtly endeavouring to remove the ſtumbling blocks of prejudice and bigotry; to approach each other, in nearer bonds of Chriſtian love and union; to awaken a deeper ſenſe of the value of immortal ſouls redeemed by the ſame price as our own; and to provoke to more zealous exertions our brethren of all denominations, to preach the Goſpel to every creature.

How that Goſpel firſt ſpread its rapid conqueſts in the heathen world—The obſtacles ſurmounted—the noble army of martyrs, who counted not their lives dear unto themſelves, —theſe fill the firſt pages of this Hiſtory, and mark the happy commencements of the Kingdom of our Lord. The decline, and fearful apoſtacy which afterwards for ages tarniſhed the glory, and checked the progreſs of the true Church of Chriſt are faithfully delineated, with their cauſes and effects. The reſurrection of truth at the reformation preſents a new ſeries of events, leading to the great conſummation, when He whoſe kingdom is an everlaſting kingdom, ſhall take to himſelf his great power and reign, and all fleſh ſhall ſee the ſalvation of our God.

The awful times into which we are fallen, have one auſpicious ſymptom attending them, that they have awakened many from the torpor of apathy; and rouſed conſiderable bodies to deeper concern about eternal things. Never

ſince

ſince the reformation commenced, hath there been a more general attention to the poor heathen, or more vigorous efforts to ſpread the Goſpel to the ends of the earth. What will be the iſſue, he who hath in his hands the hearts of all men, alone knoweth. Duty is ours, events his. You, my brethren, have ſtepped forth in the arduous attempt, may your bow abide in ſtrength! You will ſee in theſe pages, what God hath done, you know in his Book what he will do, and you have every reaſon to hope, that the time is come when he ſhall take to himſelf his great power and reign. And when he will work, none can let it.

To quicken the diligence of the faithful—to ſtrengthen the hands of the feeble—to unite all who love the Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity—to ſoften down all aſperities of controverſy—to call every faithful ſoldier around the banner of the Croſs, that they may come to the help of the Lord againſt the mighty powers of dark-

ness—This, brethren, is your object, and mine. It is becauſe I have hope, that this Hiſtory may have a tendency to promote ſuch deſirable objects, I have preſumed to commend the following Pages to your patronage, with him, who is happy to ſubſcribe himſelf,

Your affectionate brother,

And fellow-helper in the Goſpel,

T. HAWEIS.

July 10th, 1799.

CONTENTS.

CONTENTS.

VOL. I.

Page

INTRODUCTION - - 1—16.

PERIOD I. CENT. I.

SECT. I.

PROGRESS OF CHRISTIANITY, FROM THE BIRTH OF CHRIST TO THE CLOSE OF THE SCRIPTURE CANON.

CHAP. I.

The Life of Chriſt - - 19—24

CHAP. II.

The Rapid Spread of the Goſpel from the Day of Pentecoſt - - - 25—31

CHAP. III.

The Lives and Labours of the Apoſtles 32—50

CHAP. IV.

On the Nature and Adminiſtration of the Chriſtian Church, as recorded in the New

Page

Teſtament—The Acts, Epiſtles and Revelation - - - 51—92

Recapitulation of preceding Account of Church Order - - - 92—96

CHAP. V.

The Perſecutions mentioned in the Scriptures 97—100

CHAP. VI.

Hereſies and Schiſms - - 101—105

SECT. II.

END OF THE FIRST, AND COMMENCEMENT OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

CHAP. I.

State of the Church, from the Cloſe of the Canon of Scripture to the End of the Reign of Trajan—Pliny and Trajan's Letters - - - 107—128

CHAP. II.

The Concluſion of the Firſt Century—Clement and his Epiſtles - 129—142

Page

CHAP. III.

On Herefies - - - 143—145

CHAP. IV.

The Commencement of the Second Century, and the Martyrdom of Ignatius 146—160

Polycarp - - - 161—166

CHAP. V.

On Rites and Ceremonies - 167—169

CHAP. VI.

On Miraculous Powers - - 170, 171

SECT. III.

CENTURY SECOND TO THE END.

CHAP. I.

Sufferings of Chriſtians under their Perſecutors - - - 173—180

CHAP. II.

Herefies of the Second Century - 181—185

Page

CHAP. III.

Of the Eminent Perſonages and Writers to the End of the Second Century—

Juſtin - - - 186—189
Irenæus - - - 190—192
Tertullian - - - 192—199

CHAP. IV.

Government of the Church—Rites and Ceremonies - - 200—206

CHAP. V.

Of the Spiritual and True Church 207—209

SECT. IV.

TO THE DEATH OF CYPRIAN—AND THE END OF THE THIRD CENTURY.

CHAP. I.

Sufferings of the Church - 211—218

CHAP. II.

On the Hereſies of the Third Century 219—226

CHAP. III.

Of the Principal Perſonages who flouriſhed in the Third Century—

Origen - - - 227—232
Cyprian and Novatian - 232—249

Page

CHAP. IV.

Form of Government—Rites and Ceremonies - - - 250—256

CHAP. V.

On the True Spiritual Church - 256—262

SECT. V.

TO THE ACCESSION OF CONSTANTINE.

CENT. IV. PART I.

CHAP. I.

Diocleſian's Perſecution - 265—273

CHAP. II.

Conſtantine - - - 274—281

CHAP. III.

Prevailing Hereſies - - 282—392

CHAP. IV.

The Church—its Government, Rulers, Rites and Ceremonies - 293—297

CHAP. V.

Of the True Church - - 298—299

SECT. VI.

FROM CONSTANTIUS TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIFORMITY BY THEODOSIUS.

CENT. IV. TO THE END.

PART II.

CHAP. I.

The Succeſſors of Conſtantine to Theodoſius - - - 301—321

CHAP. II.

Prevailing Schiſms and Hereſies 322—327

CHAP. III.

Principal Perſonages—
Athanaſius - - - 328
Euſebius of Cæſarea - - 329
Ambroſe of Milan - - 333—338

CHAP. IV.

Church Government and Ceremonies 339—341

CHAP. V.

The Spiritual Church at the End of the Fourth Century - - 342—345

APPENDIX.

Page

INTRODUCTION - - - - 349

DISSERTATION I.

On the Eſtabliſhment of Uniformity in Religion, in Reply to the Rev. Mr. Milner, in his Second Volume of Church Hiſtory - - 351—378

DISSERTATION II.

On Schiſm - - - 379—388

DISSERTATION III.

On Infidelity, againſt Gibbon - 389—440

ERRATUM.

Page 84, line 14, for *much* read *muſt*.

INTRODUCTION.

THE volumes of eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, under which our ſhelves already groan, are immenſe; and it may require an apology for preſuming to encreaſe their number, and adding to the ponderous load. But whilſt the very magnitude of many deters from peruſal, in others the ſpirit of party has too frequently diſcoloured the optic glaſs; and the bitterneſs of bigotry, the intereſts of excluſive eſtabliſhments, the prejudices of education, or the miſts of heretical pravity, have preſented the Church through ſuch a diſtorted medium, that the fair face of truth has been disfigured by the vizor of antichriſtian deformity. Inſtead of a kingdom *not of this world*, whoſe eſſential characteriſtics are "righteouſneſs, and peace, and "joy in the Holy Ghoſt," we are diſguſted with contentions for wealth, power, and preeminence, iſſuing in anathemas of body and ſoul, and terminating in executions the moſt horrible and inhuman,

To produce a genuine, impartial eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, is confeſſedly a work of difficult attempt. *The true Church* can only be deſcribed by thoſe who are its *real* members; and not "many wiſe," in any age have been counted of that number. In the firſt days of primitive ſimplicity, the few who were beſt able to deſcribe the ſtate of their brethren, were too much engaged in the work of the miniſtry, or groaning under the weight of perſecution, to tranſmit to us explicit views of the progreſs and conſtitution of the Church of the living God. The writings of the earlieſt Chriſtians, which have been preſerved to our day, are very few; and the materials they afford, in this behalf, ſcanty and indiſtinct. Nor are they without ſuſpicion of their authenticity, at leaſt of interpolations, from the unfaithfulneſs of thoſe by whom they have been copied, and delivered down to us through a ſucceſſion of ages; perſons overwhelmed with ſuperſtition, and vindicating the lawfulneſs of pious fraud.

The firſt apoſtolic fathers were plain men; and their letters, admitting their genuineneſs, addreſſed to the conſcience in practical exhortations,

tations, and doctrinal obſervations, rather than intended to deſcribe the nature of Church government, its adminiſtration, or officers. Theſe, therefore, can only be collected from occaſional remarks, rather than expreſs definitions. The heathen authors of that day ſcarcely deign to mention the name of Chriſtians; and when they do ſo, they diſcover the moſt profound ignorance of their real character. Pliny and Tacitus, with the groſſeſt miſrepreſentations, afford a few of the beſt and moſt authentic materials reſpecting the ſtate and aſſemblies of the primitive Church.

As far as the ſacred records go, we have a clear and diſtinct view of the principles and progreſs of Chriſtianity. The doctrines of grace, and the practice of godlineſs, fill every page of the Scriptures of Truth. But whoever ſearches the New Teſtament impartially and diligently, will find *the form* of Church government not ſo clearly ſtated, nor as explicitly defined; and will perceive that our concluſions muſt be drawn from collecting and comparing the ſeveral hints, which have been dropped in the Acts of the Apoſtles, and the Epiſtles, rather than from any preciſe declara-

tions. The moment we quit the oracles of God, and deſcend into the region of uninſpired authors, we are ſtruck with the awful difference; we are compelled to examine the genuineneſs and credibility of their writings; we are bound to compare their doctrines and practices with the revealed word; and to account all that is not found correſpondent with the apoſtles and evangeliſts, but as the opinions and commandments of men. *The myſtery of iniquity* began to work in the earlieſt days, and the corruption of the human heart, even under the very eye of Paul himſelf, endeavoured to introduce error in doctrine, and pride of pre-eminence.

The earlieſt of the fathers, Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, however excellent as men, and honourable as martyrs, afford but moderate ſpecimens to admire as writers, or to edify as divines: zeal and ſimplicity are their characteriſtic features. As we advance, and more lettered men exhibit their philoſophic reveries, the truth, as it is in Jeſus, becomes proportionably debaſed. Many of theſe *fathers* ſeem to have loſt the primitive ſimplicity which is in Chriſt, and even in underſtanding to have become

become children. Yet do we not ceaſe to admire their noble intrepidity, their readineſs to ſuffer the loſs of all things, and even death itſelf, in the cauſe of their adorable Maſter. And all *the great fundamentals* are diſcoverable in their works: yet mixed, it muſt be owned, with ſo great a proportion of error and credulity, ſuch deficiency of true ſcriptural knowledge, and ſuch fancifulneſs of interpretation, as to render them very unſafe expoſitors of evangelical truth; and it requires no inconſiderable degree of induſtry and impartiality to ſeparate the grain from the chaff which overwhelms it. Truth compels me to give my readers this avowal, I hope it will not be imputed to me as preſumptuous or offenſive.

Many of my brethren, whoſe names would add weight to their ſentiments, have often expreſſed their wiſhes, under the impreſſion of the views above ſuggeſted, that ſuch a Church Hiſtory might be compoſed, as, uniting conciſeneſs with preciſion, candor with integrity, ſhould repreſent men and facts as they are, without preſſing them into the ſervice of party, or warping them to pre-conceived opinions:

and ſuch have been my endeavours. Yet conſcious of the difficulty of the taſk, it will excite no ſurpriſe, though it will probably produce regret, ſhould I incur cenſure where I covet approbation. The *outward Church* of form and human glory, prominent in the ſtruggles, for earthly pomp and emolument, will unavoidably obtrude itſelf upon our view: but the great object I mean to purſue, and on which I ſhall delight to dwell, will be *the Church of the firſt born, whoſe names are written in Heaven*: the living members united with the living Head, Jeſus Chriſt, really actuated by his Spirit, and *not of the world, as he is not of the world.* Theſe will be ſought for, not excluſively among thoſe denominated *orthodox*, but will be often found amidſt the *ſeparatiſts*, and even with ſome who have been branded with the opprobrious name of *heretics*. Reſpecting the different ſects which aroſe, we are often confined to the repreſentations of their adverſaries for their opinions and practices, yet even from theſe much may be collected in their favour: had a genuine detail of their principles and conduct reached us in their own works, which are loſt, we ſhould probably have

have found much more to eſteem. Certain it is, that many of them afford as eminent inſtances of the moſt rigid virtue and ſelf-denial, and ſubmitted as cheerfully to martyrdom for Chriſt's name ſake, as any of their revilers.

In the purſuit of truth, friends and enemies to Chriſtianity, philoſophers and apologiſts, ancient or modern, will be candidly conſidered; from Celſus and Porphyry to Gibbon and Prieſtley; and from Clement, Ignatius, Tertullian and Euſebius, to the excellent Milner; and though with the latter I cannot concur in many of his concluſions, in the main point we are cordially united. It is the very baſis on which I build, that "no Church can have any "real pretenſions to Chriſtianity, as it is con- "tained in the Scriptures of Truth, where the "foundation is not laid in the vicarious ſacri- "fice of God incarnate, and the ſuperſtructure "raiſed by the agency of the Holy Ghoſt, in "powerful acceſs to the conſciences of men, "and effectually turning them from the diſ- "obedient to the wiſdom of the juſt, that "they may obtain an inheritance among thoſe "who are ſanctified through faith, which is in "Jeſus Chriſt." Indeed any other Church,

or Chriſtianity, but this, is not worth a care, much leſs a conteſt.

From the morning ſpread upon the mountains, to the meridian ſplendor of the Sun of Righteouſneſs, I wiſh to trace the progreſs of his Goſpel, amidſt the ſtorms of perſecution, which often obſcured his beams, and the fearful defections from the power of godlineſs, which ſometimes ſeemed to threaten the extinction of his light: and my great object will be to confirm the faith, and to excite the zeal of every true diſciple; aſſured, that whatever conflicts remain to be encountered—whatever dark eclipſes may yet intercept his rays—whatever malignant attempts be made to pluck him from his ſphere—he will ſtill ſhine on ſerene in his ineffable and undiminiſhed radiance, brighter and ſtronger unto the perfect day, when his glory *ſhall be finally revealed, and all fleſh ſhall ſee it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath ſpoken it.* Contemptuous infidelity, proud philoſophy, bigotted ſuperſtition, atheiſtical immorality, heretical pravity, and political chriſtianity, may unite their powers againſt the child Jeſus, and his everlaſting Goſpel, but the gates of hell ſhall never

never prevail. His perſecuted Church will riſe, like the phœnix from her aſhes, and coming forth from the furnace of temptation, leave only the droſs behind.

Having, through divine mercy, obtained grace to be faithful—in providence received my education—and been called to miniſter in the Church of England, I have embraced and ſubſcribed her articles, *ex animo*, and have continued to prefer an epiſcopal mode of government; and I am content herein to abide with God, till I can find one more purely apoſtolic. But diſclaiming all *excluſive* pretenſions, and joined to the Lord in one ſpirit, with all the faithful of every denomination, I candidly avow my conviction; that the true Church is *catholic*, or univerſal; not monopolized by any one body of profeſſing Chriſtians, but eſſentially *a ſpiritual Church*; and conſiſting only and equally of thoſe who, in every denomination, love our Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity. Reſpecting the adminiſtration of *this Church*, I am not convinced that the Lord of Life and Glory left any preciſe regulations. His kingdom could alike ſubſiſt under any ſpecies of government; and having nothing

nothing to do with this world, was in externals to be regulated by exiſting circumſtances. Whether epiſcopacy, a preſbytery, or the congregational order, be eſtabliſhed as the dominant profeſſion, it affects not the body of Chriſt. The *living members*, under each of theſe modes of adminiſtration, are alike bound to love one another out of a pure heart fervently; to indulge their brethren in the ſame liberty of private judgment, which they exerciſe themſelves; and ought never to ſuffer theſe regulations of outward order to deſtroy the unity of the ſpirit, or to break the bonds of peace.

When I ſpeak of epiſcopacy, as moſt correſpondent, in my poor ideas, to the apoſtolic practice, and the general uſage of the Church in the firſt, and generally eſteemed purer ages, let no man imagine I plead for that epiſcopacy, which riſing very early on the ſtilts of prelatical pride and worldly-mindedneſs, has ſince overſpread the earth with its baneful ſhadow; or ſuppoſe thoſe to be the true ſucceſſors of the apoſtles, who, graſping at power and pre-eminence over Churches, which their labours never planted or watered, claim dominion

nion over diſtricts, provinces, kingdoms, beyond all power of individual ſuperintendence. Theſe *all, every where,* and *in every age,* have manifeſted the ſame ſpirit of Antichriſt; and that juſt in proportion as their uſurpation of authority over the Churches and the conſciences of men, hath been moſt extenſive, moſt excluſive, and moſt intolerant.

The following ſketch of *the Primitive Church* will not, I hope, be found to deviate far from what appears in the ſacred records. Beginning at Jeruſalem, from thence the apoſtles, and great *itinerant evangeliſts,* iſſued forth publiſhing the glad tidings of ſalvation, in the name of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Wherever their labours were effectual, and Jews or Gentiles were called to the obedience of faith, there, as ſoon as a few united for worſhip, in the apoſtles' doctrine and fellowſhip, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers, they appointed the perſon moſt apt to teach, and of beſt report among their brethren, to lead the devotions of the faithful. He was uſually an elderly man; and one who poſſeſſed an houſe, where this little congregation might aſſemble. He became their preſbyter, or biſhop; terms in the Scripture

ture *evidently ſynonimous.** All looked at firſt to Jeruſalem, as the centre to which doubts and difficulties were to be referred, and from whence direction ſhould be received.

The learned Chancellor King ſuppoſes, that to the end of the third century, the largeſt and moſt populous cities had but one church and one biſhop. That the preſbyters, though of the ſame order with the biſhop, and capable of performing all epiſcopal offices, as ſoon as elected into a pariſh or dioceſe, yet till then were only his vicars. But, I think, a ſimpler mode, and one more conformable to the Scriptures, can be traced. When one congregation increaſed beyond the capacity of the firſt houſe to accommodate it, another was formed, and another elder or preſbyter appointed. There were *ſeveral biſhops* at Philippi, no very extenſive city, Philip. i. 1.; many epiſcopal elders were at Epheſus, who met Paul at Miletum, Acts xx. 28, and probably in every other place where the Goſpel had made any conſiderable progreſs. From the number of

* See Archbiſhop Uſher's Letters—Lord King's Primitive Church—Cranmer and Biſhops Conferences—Burnet's Reformation, vol. i. p. 223, 324.

converts

converts at Jeruſalem, from the company of great itinerant evangeliſts at Antioch, from the multitude of Chriſtians at Epheſus, and of teachers, true and falſe, at Corinth; it can hardly be ſuppoſed poſſible that they ſhould all aſſemble in one place, or be under the ſuperintendence of a particular perſon, intimately acquainted with every member of his congregation down to the meaneſt ſlave, and which, as King affirms, was the duty of every biſhop or preſbyter. Hence it ſeems moſt natural to infer, that where the believers multiplied, another houſe or church was opened, and a new biſhop ordained. Yet all united in one church fellowſhip, under the ſuperintendence of the apoſtolic men at firſt, and, on their deceaſe, the moſt diſtinguiſhed for zeal, wiſdom, ſufferings, influence, or reſpectability of any kind, was called by the ſuffrage of the elders and people to be their ſuperintendent, preſident, præſul, ἡγούμενος, and thus the name of biſhop, κατ' ἐξοχήν, became very early appropriate to one who was the *primus inter pares*, and, as Archbiſhop Uſher ſays, *gradu tantum non ordine differebat*, differed in degree only of advancement, not in order. Theſe were, I apprehend, always from the apoſtolic days raiſed to this ſtation,

ſtation, by the voice of the people and their fellows; they preſided in the deliberations of their ſeveral churches, with the preſbyters their aſſeſſors. They were deputed to all ſynods, which treated of eccleſiaſtical matters. And whilſt every congregation judged its own members, they received the accuſations againſt elders who were charged with offence, and cenſured or removed them. They examined the choſen candidates for the miniſtry, and, with the preſbytery, ordained them by impoſition of hands. This dangerous eminence marked them as peculiar victims in days of perſecution. Far therefore from being an enviable or deſirable ſituation, no man dared aſpire after, or occupy it, but ſuch as counted their lives not dear unto themſelves, that they might finiſh their courſe with joy, and the miniſtry which they had received of the Lord to fulfil it, whether as confeſſors, or martyrs.

In the ſequel of this work ſuch worthies will be ſeen riſing up in the ſimplicity of a faithful teſtimony for Chriſt, the pillars of the Church of the living God: not decked with earthly ſplendor, or gorgeous apparel; not ruling extenſive dioceſes, with vaſt revenues, but plain

plain men, wearing often the garb of poverty and humility, in no eminence of birth, or of philoſophical or ſcientific attainments; devoting their own little ſubſtance, as well as what the piety of the faithful entruſted to their care, to the nobleſt acts of charity; eminently ſelf denied in their own conduct, and exhibiting to their flocks the brighteſt examples of deadneſs to the world, and heavenly mindedneſs; employing their lives in unwearied labours for the ſouls of men; and affecting no pre-eminence above their fellows, but that which age, excellence, and ſuperior ſervice, naturally ſecured to them. Where the danger was ſo great, and the advantage ſo ſmall, a man of God could only be conſtrained by conſcience, and the ſuffrage of his brethren, or by ardent zeal for the glory of his Lord to undertake the awful charge. Such were the primitive biſhops appointed by the great Shepherd and Biſhop of ſouls. The impoſition of hands confirmed the people's choice, and acknowledged the divine call, placing theſe in the foremoſt rank of death and dignity.

The hiſtory of the Church naturally divides itſelf into three great periods.

The

The firſt compriſing its riſe and progreſs in the four firſt centuries, till the excluſive eſtabliſhment of Theodoſius.

The ſecond, the deep decline and fearful apoſtacy of the eleven ſucceeding ages.

The third, the happy revival of evangelical religion, from the times of the Reformation to the cloſe of the preſent century.

VOLUME

VOLUME I.

PERIOD I.

This will contain the four firſt centuries, under the following heads:

1. The progreſs of Chriſtianity, from the birth of Chriſt to the cloſe of the Scripture canon.
2. Continuation to the end of the reign of Trajan—with the martyrdom of Ignatius and Polycarp.
3. To the death of Cyprian.
4. The triumph of Chriſtianity under Conſtantine.
5. The excluſive eſtabliſhment of uniformity by Theodoſius the *Great*. A title often proſtituted to flatter human pride, and ſeldom, I fear, expreſſive of chriſtian excellence!

CENT. I.

SECTION I.

The progreſs of Chriſtianity from the birth of Chriſt to the cloſe of the Scripture canon.

This period will comprehend,

1. The life of Chriſt.
2. The rapid ſpread of the Goſpel from the day of Pentecoſt.
3. The lives of the Apoſtles.
4. The nature and adminiſtration of the Chriſtian Church, as recorded in the New Teſtament.
5. The perſecutions mentioned in the Scriptures.
6. The hereſies and ſchiſms which aroſe in the days of the Apoſtles.

AN

IMPARTIAL HISTORY

OF THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST.

CHAP. I.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

THE Author of our ſalvation, the incarnate Son of God, was born in Bethlehem, in the days of Herod, the Idumean, who had been raiſed by Auguſtus, the Roman emperor, to the throne of Judea. The preciſe year of his birth hath been diſputed by learned chronologiſts. It ſeems, however, but of little importance. It is ſufficient that the evangeliſts have deſcribed this great and ſingular event in the fulleſt manner, and in all its circumſtances. The firſt years of his infancy, after his flight from the bloody tyrant, were ſpent in Egypt; and from his return to his native land, till he entered on his miniſtry, we have but one authentic trait recorded of his earlier days, when his thirſt for knowledge detained him at the temple at Je-

ruſalem, and the Jewiſh rabbis were aſtoniſhed at his underſtanding and anſwers. Luke ii. 47.

From twelve years of age he lived in a ſtate of ſubjection to his parents at Nazareth, Luke ii. 51. and there is every reaſon to ſuppoſe that he worked at his father's occupation, as a carpenter, miniſtring to his parents' neceſſities and his own. Mark vi. 3. The labours of induſtry are honourable employments.

About the age of thirty he was ſolemnly inaugurated in office by his forerunner John, receiving the rite of baptiſm, and the fulneſs of the Spirit: and after the awful conflict with the great enemy of mankind in the wilderneſs, he entered on his miniſtry, and ſhewed himſelf unto Iſrael as the Meſſiah. During three years or more, the ſpace which ſeems recorded by the Evangeliſts, we behold a diſplay of ſuch a character, as had never before appeared among the children of men. His life was ſpent in the nobleſt acts of beneficence to the bodies and ſouls of men. His whole temper and conduct were the living comment of the ſublime and heavenly truths which he taught. His doctrines bore the broad ſtamp of Deity in their intrinſic excellence; and received the fulleſt confirmation from the moſt aſtoniſhing miracles, performed in his own name, and at his own pleaſure.

Every

Every word, every action, from the day of his birth, till his expiring cry on the croſs, concurred in demonſtrating the truth of the centurion's teſtimony, "*Truly this was the Son of God.*"

His miniſtry and miracles awakened vaſt attention, but excited equal envy and enmity. A few, and but a few, dared to join themſelves unto him, and confeſs him as the Meſſiah; and theſe, the leaſt and loweſt among the people. His principal and firſt followers, whom he called to be Apoſtles, or Miſſionaries, were chiefly fiſhermen, Galileans, poor, and illiterate. From them he choſe twelve to be his companions, and witneſſes of all his wondrous words and works; afterwards he appointed ſeventy others, whom he ſent forth to preach and teach the coming of his kingdom. Before his departure the number of his diſciples had increaſed to above five hundred. 1 Cor. xv. 6.

So inconſiderable appeared the effects of Chriſt's perſonal miniſtry upon earth, notwithſtanding all the miracles performed before the thouſands of Iſrael. Nor did even theſe as yet truly underſtand the nature of that kingdom of God which ſhould come. Swayed by the prevailing prejudices of their countrymen, and the traditions of their elders, they ſtill looked for a temporal Meſſiah, and expected that at this time he would reſtore the

kingdom to Iſrael. Acts i. 6. A fond opinion, which they were reluctant to part with, but which diſappeared from the day that the Spirit was poured out from on high. In his frequent conferences with them, after his reſurrection from the dead, Chriſt had commanded them to wait for this Holy Ghoſt at Jeruſalem: comforting them with the aſſurance, that after his aſcenſion into heaven he would ſend them another comforter, whoſe efficacious teachings ſhould not only lead them into *all truth*, but whoſe almighty power ſhould enable them to perform greater works and wonders than thoſe which he himſelf had wrought, or they had ever yet beheld. The fulfilment of this was eminently diſplayed, in *the gift of tongues*, whereby theſe illiterate men were enabled to ſpread the goſpel through all nations, and what was ſtill a greater inſtance of divine energy than all the mighty miracles performed by them, by the ſame Spirit they were endued with power from on high, to call from *the grave of ſpiritual death* the millions who ſhould hear their voice and live.

I wave enlarging on the particulars, which will be found in the Evangeliſts, of his life of toil and ſufferings, terminated by a death of ignominy and torment—his triumphs over the grave—his commiſſion and inſtructions given to his diſciples after his reſurrection—his glorious aſcenſion—and the deſcent

deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt on thoſe whom he had choſen to be the witneſſes of his works; the heralds of his goſpel; and the confeſſors and martyrs for the truth. Suffice it to ſay, that from the Head Chriſt the vital power was derived which animated the firſt preachers of the croſs: the ſame divine influence hath continued through all the ages paſt; and to this day it ceaſes not to be diſplayed in the hearts and conſciences of all the redeemed from the earth. United in one myſtical body, theſe are alike all taught of the ſame God, and animated by the ſame Spirit; and without this Spirit, whatever profeſſion of Chriſt any man may make, *he is none of his*, (Rom. viii. 9.) and knows nothing as he ought to know: ſince *no man can ſay that Jeſus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghoſt*, (1 Cor. xii. 3.) nor can any life of Chriſt appear in our mortal bodies, but as he giveth us of his Spirit, and we *are created anew in Chriſt Jeſus unto good works*. To this, as the moſt important of all truths, the whole revelation of God leads: and I regard it as the principal object in this eccleſiaſtical hiſtory to ſearch out the ſpiritual Iſrael of God in all ages, and among all the nations, whither the light of divine truth hath been diffuſed.

I cannot cloſe this life of Chriſt without adverting to an abſurd tradition, preſerved in Euſebius, reſpecting letters to a King Agbarus. And I do

this in order to ſhew how little credit can be placed on this father of eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, as he has been called, pretending to derive the evidence of theſe fabulous epiſtles from the archives of Edeſſa. The more I conſider Euſebius's character, the leſs I am diſpoſed to receive his teſtimony in this and many other particulars: and it is much to be lamented that the ſcantineſs of original information has reduced hiſtorians ſo often and ſo largely to copy from him as authority. That he may have preſerved many traditional truths need not be diſputed; but whoever reads his works muſt ſee how very credulous he was, and how little to be implicitly believed. The traditions of two hundred years, flowing often through the muddy channels of human weakneſs, folly and fraud, had tranſmitted a ſtream very unlike the pure waters of life from the ſacred fountain. Beſides, his own ſentiments in ſome of the moſt fundamental doctrines of the goſpel were fearfully ſwerved from the apoſtolic model; and his courtly practice too conformed to this world to ſtamp veracity on his repreſentations. I fear he knew as little of *real chriſtianity* as his royal diſciple Conſtantine, whom he ſo egregiouſly flatters. The more I read the more I doubt the authenticity of his teſtimony, and dare not receive his hiſtory as oracular.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

THE RAPID SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL FROM THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

WHEN Jeſus glorified poured out his Spirit from on high upon his diſciples, according to his promiſe, a flood of light inſtantly broke forth on a benighted world. The Sun of Righteouſneſs aroſe, and from Jeruſalem darted his bright beams on every ſide through the known world.

Diſmal and dark at that time was the ſtate of mankind. *The Heathens* ſunk in the groſſeſt idolatry; ſullied with every vice, (ſee Rom. i. 21—32); their conſciences cauteriſed; and the fouleſt crimes ſanctified by the very examples of the gods whom they worſhipped. *The Jews*, infected with equal abominations, (ſee Rom. ii. 17—24.) zealous indeed for Moſes, proud of their fœderal relation to Abraham, preciſe in the formalities of worſhip and the minutiæ of ceremonies, but dead to all ſpiritual religion, and, as their own hiſtorian Joſephus witneſſes, fallen into the deepeſt depravity of manners, and all kinds of profligacy. The whole earth appeared immerged in the univerſal deluge of prevailing

vailing corruption. But no ſooner did the inſpired fiſhermen of Galilee go forth in the name of their divine Maſter to teſtify of the world that its deeds were evil, than irreſiſtible conviction ſeized on the conſciences of men. On the very day of Pentecoſt, when they inſtantly began with power to bear witneſs to the reſurrection of their divine Maſter, and to declare the eternal redemption purchaſed by his blood-ſhedding for us, three thouſand ſouls were added to the church; and myriads, within a very ſhort ſpace of time, confeſſed him as their Lord, whom they had rejected as an impoſtor, and crucified as a blaſphemer. Probably the very perſons ſtood forth the witneſſes for his croſs, who had moſt contributed to nail him thereon. See Acts ii. 23—37.

The ſudden ability of illiterate men—of ſo great a number—in a moment—and with perfection—to ſpeak in *all* languages—to expreſs themſelves with ſuch propriety and force, as not only to be clearly underſtood, but impreſſive on the conſciences of the numerous foreigners then aſſembled at Jeruſalem from every nation under heaven—Such a phenomenon could not but ſtrike the hearers with aſtoniſhment, and afford an evidence of divine agency too inconteſtible to admit of a rational doubt. But even this would only have excited a momentary ſenſation of wonder and ſurprize,

prize, if *the ſame Spirit*, who gave the tongue to ſpeak, had not opened the ear to hear, and the heart to underſtand. *Inſtantly*, and with the deepeſt convictions of the truth, their conſciences were pierced, as with a ſword, and they cried out under the word, *Men and brethren what ſhall we do?* Acts ii. 37. They immediately received the fœderal rite of baptiſm, joined themſelves to the deſpiſed followers of the crucified Nazarene, and were received into the boſom of the Chriſtian Church; *partaking in the apoſtles' doctrine and fellowſhip, and in breaking of bread and in prayer.* Speedily they filled Jeruſalem with their doctrine, to the inexpreſſible joy of the poor, to whom the goſpel was preached, and to the excitement of the deepeſt malignity and wrath in the phariſees and ſcribes, the rulers of Iſrael, whoſe earthly, ſenſual hearts perſiſted in the rejection of the counſel of God againſt their own ſouls. Let infidels read, blaſpheme and tremble!

Two events naturally flowed from theſe commencements. 1. The exaſperated ſpirit of the enemies of Chriſt ſought to ſtrangle in the cradle the infant church. A fierce perſecution aroſe from the Jewiſh zealots, and Stephen led the way to the noble army of martyrs. Acts vii. 60. 2. Diſperſed in order to ſave themſelves from the rage of their enemies, many of the diſciples fled from Jeruſalem

ruſalem into the different parts of Paleſtine, and the adjacent territories, and wherever they went, carried with them the tidings of ſalvation through their crucified Lord, and, as we learn from the Acts of the Apoſtles, with the moſt prodigious effects. Some alſo of the firſt converts who had returned from Jeruſalem, after the day of Pentecoſt, to their ſeveral abodes, widely diſperſed the ſame bleſſed truth, which they themſelves had been taught by the power of the Holy Ghoſt. The ſucceſs of ſome of theſe among the Jews at Damaſcus awakened the bigot fury of the zealot Saul. Ambitious of a commiſſion from the high-prieſt to ſeize, impriſon, puniſh, and bring in chains to Jeruſalem, any whom he ſhould find in that city converts to the chriſtian doctrine, reeking with the blood of the martyr Stephen, and filled with all the pride of brief authority, with which he had been inveſted, he is ready to dart on his prey. The iſſue is well known, and affords one of the moſt ſtriking inſtances ever recorded of the power of the grace of Chriſt over the moſt blind, bitter and obdurate of mankind.

I paſs rapidly over the ſimple, beautiful narrative of tranſactions recorded in the Acts of the Apoſtles. To theſe I ſhall be called to advert more fully in a ſubſequent page. Suffice it at preſent to remark the glowing zeal, the fervent charity, the

the noble diſintereſtedneſs, the holy walk, and the divine conſolations of the Spirit, which marked the diſciples as a body, and proved the genuineneſs of the faith which they profeſſed.

The Church at Jeruſalem ſeems to have been under the preſidence of the Apoſtle James. Peter's pre-eminence either among the Jews in Paleſtine, or the Gentiles in the nations, no where appears. And as to the idea of his being the founder and biſhop of the church at Rome, it is evident that it was raiſed by no labours of his, and a matter very doubtful whether he ever viſited that metropolis of the world.

The great luminary was now ariſing to carry the light of the everlaſting goſpel into the heathen nations, and to diſplay a ſcene of labours and ſucceſs unequalled in the records of the Chriſtian Church. The wretch, who breathed nothing but threatenings and ſlaughter againſt the fold of Chriſt, arreſted in his mad career, is ſuddenly changed by the power of the Spirit of Jeſus, from a perſecutor to a preacher, from Saul the murderer, to Paul the Apoſtle of the Gentiles. The greater part of THE ACTS contains the account of his life and labours, recorded by his faithful attendant, and companion in the work, LUKE the Evangeliſt. By his unwearied

wearied exertions, in conjunction with thoſe of his brethren engaged in the ſame bleſſed work, the light of truth was in a very ſhort ſpace of time diffuſed through all countries of the immenſe Roman Empire, and even far beyond its remoteſt bounds; where flouriſhing churches were planted innumerable, adorned with every gift and grace of the Holy Ghoſt. The moſt remarkable of theſe will come under our conſideration when we enter into a more particular detail of the labours of thoſe men of God, who went forth preaching *every where*; confining indeed at firſt the circle of their operations to their Jewiſh brethren, but ſhortly after unfolding, by particular order of their adorable Maſter, the gates of life to the Gentile world, and collecting, from all kindreds, tongues, nations and languages, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, a people to the eternal praiſe of the glory of his grace.

An. 63. The hiſtory of the Acts of the Apoſtles cloſes with Paul's firſt impriſonment at Rome, where he found a church already formed, to whoſe eſtabliſhment his own beautiful epiſtle had no doubt greatly contributed; and which, during his confinement, his labours of love abundantly enlarged. On his return to the ſame place, under the tyrant Nero, he ſeems to have cloſed his ſhining career,

and

and is ſaid to have there ſealed his teſtimony with his blood. The ſtate of the church during this period is chiefly to be drawn from the Acts of the Apoſtles, and the Epiſtles of Paul, with ſome additions from thoſe of Peter, James, John and Jude. Theſe authentic records we follow with confidence and certainty; the moment we ſtep beyond this ſacred circle, our materials are few, and the authority of them queſtionable.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

THE LIVES AND LABOURS OF THE APOSTLES.

DURING the firſt period of Chriſtianity the lives and labours of the divinely qualified Evangeliſts demand our particular conſideration: as the ſtate and government of the church will beſt appear in the courſe of their itinerancy, and the happy ſucceſs of their preaching.

PAUL.

Though called the laſt to the apoſtleſhip, terming himſelf but as an abortion, and coining a word on purpoſe to expreſs his ſenſe of his own diminutiveneſs, Paul ſtands allowedly in the firſt rank of eminence. In nothing behind the very chief of the apoſtles, according to his own confeſſion, and in my view, ſhining in a ſphere of peculiar ſplendor,

Velut inter ignes
Luna minores.

whilſt the generality of the others were choſen out of the loweſt orders of ſociety, αγραμματοι ἐ ἰδιῶται, (Acts iv. 13.) men of no literary acquirements, Paul ſeems to have been born in the ſuperior ranks

ranks of life: a Roman citizen by birth, of Tarſus in Cilicia; the ſon of a reſpectable Phariſee, in a pure line of honourable deſcent; his father in a capacity to afford the firſt education for his ſon in the ſchool of Jeruſalem, under the tuition of the learned Gamaliel; and to ſupport him many years in the proſecution of his ſtudies in this metropolis of Jewiſh learning and glory. His abilities were great as his ſtation in life was reſpectable; and his proficiency in ſcientific attainments ſingular; "*above*, ſays he, *many of my equals in mine own nation.*" But his exemplary piety ſtill more eminently adorned his youthful progreſs; peculiarly obſervant of the Moſaic inſtitutions, he embraced with zeal the traditions of the Elders, and rigid in Phariſaical prejudices, he became on principle a determined perſecutor. He thought *he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jeſus of Nazareth*; which things he ardently purſued, compelling the feeble to blaſpheme, and ſtoning to death the ſtedfaſt; and being exceedingly mad againſt them, he perſecuted them even to ſtrange cities. He had been taught to regard the Son of Mary as an impoſtor and blaſphemer, and to hate him with a hatred peculiarly bitter, as an apoſtate from the Law of Moſes, and for attempting to draw away diſciples after him, to the diſhonour of Jehovah and his divinely appointed inſtitutions. In the very act of ſavage purſuit after theſe ſuffering followers of

the deſpiſed Galilean, the ſtrong arm of
AN. 35. Almighty Grace arreſts him in his mid career. He hears the voice of Jeſus, and ſtruck with the lightning of his countenance, is caſt proſtrate on the earth before the adorable perſonage whom he was perſecuting in his members. After three days ſuffering the loſs of ſight, and deeper darkneſs and horrors of mind from reflections on his own former conduct, the healing hand of Ananias, and his yet more conſolatory words, reſtored him at once to the light of day and the light of life. The ſcales which fell from his eyes opened again a paſſage for the beams of the ſun; but a brighter Sun ſhone upon his heart, and that Jeſus whom he had ſo bitterly perſecuted had given him the light of the knowledge of his glory. No moment's delay retarded his open confeſſion of his glorified Lord; he aroſe ſtraightway, and was baptiſed in his name; and as ſoon as his ſtrength, exhauſted through faſting and anguiſh of mind, was reſtored by peace of conſcience and a return to his neceſſary food, he immediately commenced his ſhining courſe, and, holding up the Word of Light, proclaimed him in the ſynagogue as the Son of God, whom he had blaſphemed as an impoſtor, and whoſe worſhippers he had come thither on purpoſe to extirpate. I wiſh the enemies to Chriſtianity impartially to conſider the converſion of the Apoſtle Paul, and all its concomitant circumſtances. This will

will aſſuredly be found among the many other evidences of the truth of our religion, ſuch a one as will leave thoſe without excuſe who neglect ſo great ſalvation. *Their* converſion, indeed, I am fully ſenſible, can only be effected by the ſame divine power which wrought in this arch-enemy of the Chriſtian name, and if not in a way as miraculous, yet will be attended with evidence as real, that "this hath God done, and we ſhall perceive that it is his work." From the firſt burſting forth of this choſen veſſel out of the womb of darkneſs into Chriſt's marvellous light, his activity in the cauſe which he had embraced, exceeded the ardor of perſecution by which he had been diſtinguiſhed. He flew as with the wings of a ſeraph over the habitable globe, and the vaſtneſs of his ſucceſs correſponded with the rapidity of his movements, and the indefatigable labours of his miniſtry. From Damaſcus to Arabia, Judea, Syria, Aſia Minor, Greece, and round about unto Illyricum, he had fully preached the Goſpel of Chriſt. Returning with the ſame unwearied diligence to viſit all the Churches his miniſtry had planted, he received a divine intimation that he muſt ſhortly viſit Italy alſo; and he extended his views into Spain. An eye caſt over this immenſe tract of country will fill us with aſtoniſhment how one man's labour could fill ſo extenſive a ſphere, and demonſtrates how much may be done when the Spirit of Jeſus

animates, and the benediction of the Holy Ghoſt accompanies the Goſpel word in power, and in much aſſurance.

The particular enumeration of the flouriſhing Churches collected by his Miniſtry, will come more properly under our conſideration when we enter upon his Epiſtles. He gratefully acknowledges how greatly his bleſſed Maſter cauſed him to triumph, and made manifeſt by him the ſavour of his grace in every place, in Damaſcus, Antioch, Epheſus, Philippi, Corinth, Galatia, the regions of Greece, at Rome, the capital of the world, and innumerable other places, of which no records remain; for *every where* he preached, and taught Jeſus Chriſt, and in *every place* the Spirit of God made his miniſtrations the ſavour of life unto life.

There is one particular I may not forget, and which we Gentiles are bound to acknowledge with peculiar thankfulneſs; that he is eminently *our* Apoſtle. The other Apoſtles reſtricted their labours, at leaſt for a while, *to the Jews only*, (Acts xi. 19.) and it required a particular revelation to engage Peter to viſit Cornelius, (Acts, ch. x.) nor did that caſt down the wall of ſeparation, but was regarded as a ſingular caſe. It was reſerved for Paul, by an expreſs viſion, to be ſent from the Temple far off unto the Gentiles. Yet even HE, in

in compliance with the reſpect he bore to his brethren after the fleſh, commenced with the ſynagogue; being there rejected, leaving them without excuſe, he turned to the heathen, and among them reaped that abundant harveſt, the happy effects of which are continued unto this day. We ſhall ſee in the conſideration of the nature of the Churches formed by him, what oppoſition he met from his Jewiſh brethren in many places, and rejoice in the decree which ſettled Chriſtian liberty and equal privileges.

A miniſtry of more than thirty years was terminated, it is probable, by martyrdom. On
AN. 66. his ſecond viſit, as a priſoner, to Rome, he conſiders himſelf as ready to be offered up, and chearfully prepares to ſeal with his blood the teſtimony he had borne. I regard Paul as the firſt of human beings, to whom more are indebted for ſalvation, under the Great Head of the Church, than to any other creature. If his labours and preaching, as recorded, be taken into the account—if we conſider his Epiſtles to the ſeveral Churches, the ineſtimably bleſſed effects of which muſt be felt and acknowledged in all Churches to the end of time—if we mark the preciſion and clearneſs with which the characteriſtic doctrines of the Goſpel therein are diſplayed—and the infinitely greater bleſſings derived from them to the Chriſtian world in

general, beyond all that individual Churches, to which they were addreſſed, could poſſibly have reaped—who is there that hath ever, ſince the day of their promulgation, but bleſſed the Great Head of the Church for the Apoſtle Paul?—I do not put *Saint*, before his name, to ennoble him, for that title he enjoys only in common with every believer. There is not an individual joined to the Lord in one ſpirit, but is *called to be a Saint*. With regard to Paul, he might juſtly ſay of himſelf, I am more; in labours, ſuffering, bleſſing, ſucceſs, raiſed above his fellows. The ridiculous diſtinction of a red letter in the calendar, he would have treated as contemptibly as any man can poſſibly do it for him. As the chief of ſinners, he gloried in being ſaved by grace; and having much forgiven, he endeavoured to expreſs his ſenſibility, by labouring more abundantly than they all. His judgment, like that of every other poor ſinner, is with God, the judge of all. I expect to ſee him firſt at the right hand of his Divine Maſter.

PETER.

Peter, though not the firſt called to apoſtleſhip, nor probably the chief in honour, eminence and uſefulneſs, ranks high in the ſacred college. Zealous for his divine Maſter: intrepid in ſpirit; the firſt in forwardneſs; and acknowledged as among the

the chief pillars of the Church, by one of its moſt competent judges, Peter ſtands next to Paul in the rank of the noble army of martyrs and confeſſors. No man during our Lord's life expreſſed ſtronger attachment to him, followed him with greater fidelity, or ſhewed on every occaſion, but one, a ſoul more devoted to his honour and ſervice. When his Maſter's reſurrection was announced, his eager ſpirit led him among the foremoſt to run to the ſepulchre; and to him of all his Apoſtles, the Lord of Life and Glory was pleaſed firſt to manifeſt himſelf, after his victory over the grave. He needed this token of favour to bind up the wounds of his broken heart, after his late ſudden, and fearful fall. Who is ſafe from temptation when ſuch a man gives ſuch an humiliating evidence of human infirmity?

He appears after the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt among the moſt intrepid witneſſes for his adorable Lord, and the bold accuſer of his betrayers and murderers. His zeal, his ſufferings, his ſucceſs, on the very firſt day of Pentecoſt, and all his ſubſequent conduct, prove how juſtly he merited the regard in which he was held by the Church at Jeruſalem. The Acts of the Apoſtles record in a very great part of them the labours of this worthy of the true David.

He, like his brethren, was for a while ſtill under the reſtrictive bond of confining the preaching of the Goſpel to the Jewiſh pale. An immediate revelation from God, which ſent him to Cornelius, was not ſufficient entirely to ſubdue his prejudices; and though afterwards he ſtood up to vindicate Gentile liberty, he himſelf ſeemed ſtill too partial to his Jewiſh brethren, and received at Antioch the juſt rebuke of Paul for his diſſimulation. The beſt of men are not without blame; and grace of the moſt enlarged meaſure may not wholly eradicate educational prejudices. Yet he triumphed over them at laſt, and his Epiſtles appear addreſſed to the Gentile converts ſcattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Aſia, and Bithynia, who had probably ſhared the benefits of his miniſtry, and through whom, to the lateſt ages, the Church will receive the edification of thoſe beautiful letters, though immediately written for the uſe of his cotemporaries.

It ſeems to have been a matter decided by the Church reſpecting the two itinerant Apoſtles, that Paul ſhould go to the Gentiles, and Peter to the circumciſion. I ſuppoſe there was great wiſdom herein diſplayed. The ſtrong prejudices entertained by the Jews againſt Paul rendered him peculiarly obnoxious, and would make them more indiſpoſed to receive his miniſtry; whilſt Peter, from having expreſſed a partiality, ſometimes even blameable, for his

his brethren after the flesh, was more likely to engage their attention, and conciliate their regard.

Respecting the sphere of his labours, we have no authentic records, except the Acts of the Apostles and his own Epistles. In these his services appear to have been eminently useful in Judea and Samaria. We find him at Antioch; and probably through all Asia Minor he had preached to those to whom he directed his two Epistles. It is highly probable that the East was the great scene of his labours, where the remnant of the twelve tribes had left a numerous posterity; and I have been led to suppose, that the η εν Βαβυλωνι συνεκλεκτη, 1 Pet. v. 13. which we translate, "*The Church which is at Babylon elect together with you,*" as joined with "*Marcus my son,*" was either his *wife*, whom he had married at Babylon, probably in the course of his ministry, or *the Church* there planted by his labours; for such appears the natural sense of the words. The idea that this refers to Rome seems a most unfounded interpretation. No vestige appears in the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Paul, or his own, of his having ever visited the western regions, nor does Rome ever appear in any of them under this title. The trumped-up tradition of after-times, to give dignity and pre-eminence to that metropolis of the world, with all the horrid abuses which have flowed from it, hath ever appeared

peared to me among the frauds, againſt which, whoever reads eccleſiaſtical hiſtory muſt be continually on their guard. He will ſee, from Euſebius to Bellarmine, a tiſſue of improbable fictions, to give dignity to a Church which is truly the mother of harlots and of all abominations. His conteſt with Simon the ſorcerer, and miraculous victory, are among the apocryphal tales of the credulous eccleſiaſtical hiſtorian Euſebius. That he finiſhed his courſe as a martyr for thoſe truths which he ſo zealouſly preached is highly probable, not merely as the report of tradition, but as it ſeems predicted by his bleſſed Maſter. John xxi. 19, but of the time, the manner, and place of his death, we have no authentic record.

Of the other Apoſtles of the Lord, the Scriptures make but a ſcanty mention; and little credit is to be paid to the fables concerning them, which the after ages invented to ſupply the lack of other evidence.

ANDREW

Was the firſt called to the apoſtleſhip. He had attended the miniſtry of John the Baptiſt, and hearing him point out Jeſus, when he paſſed by, as the Lamb of God, he, with a companion, immediately followed him; and the converſation of the

the Great Maſter that day convinced him of his true character, as *the Chriſt*. A diſcovery ſo important could not dwell in his boſom a moment concealed: he haſtened to impart it to his own brother Simon, and eagerly introduced him to an acquaintance with the Meſſiah. All the days of his Maſter's abode upon earth, he was his faithful follower, and conſtant attendant; and he is mentioned by name as among thoſe who continued in prayer to their adorable Lord at Jeruſalem, for the promiſe which he had left them, Acts i. 13. His labours, no doubt, were correſpondent to his ſtation, though no divine record informs us of the peculiar ſcene of his miniſtry. Churches ambitious of having Apoſtles for their founders, traced often their origin from ſources which they ſuppoſed would do them honour. Since ſuperſtition has bowed its head, the real Chriſtian no longer prides himſelf in the dignity of his Church, but is alone ſolicitous that he ſhould be found in Chriſt, and faithful unto death.

JOHN

Was the beloved diſciple. Jeſus was a man: amiableneſs engaged his affection. John lay in his boſom. He was admitted to the glorious ſcene of transfiguration on the Mount, and to behold the more awful ſpectacle of the agony in the garden. He

His faithful attachment withheld him from deſerting his Maſter at the laſt trying conflict. Though he ſhared in the momentary panic, when all his diſciples forſook him, and fled, he was the firſt to recover from the conſternation: he followed Chriſt into the High Prieſt's Palace; and ſtood by his croſs at the mournful ſcene of crucifixion. To him the dying Lord commended his agonizing mother; and honoured by the charge, he immediately took her to his own home, and provided for her as a dutiful ſon. After Chriſt's reſurrection, he was the firſt to run to the tomb on the report of the women. Love added wings to his feet, when he outran Peter: and what he ſaw ſeems to have engaged his credit to the teſtimony which he had heard.

He appears among the zealous confeſſors at Jeruſalem, and Peter's companion at the Temple: great in the miracles wrought by him, great in the teſtimony born to his adorable Maſter, great in ſuffering for his name's ſake. Yet of his life, remarkably extended, we have few authentic particulars. His Goſpel, Epiſtles, and Revelations, breathe a ſpirit of diſtinguiſhed love and honour for his glorious Lord; and ſtand the living monuments of God, the Spirit, ſpeaking in him and by him, for the edification, comfort, and inſtruction of the Church to the lateſt ages.

He

He ſeems, with his brethren the Apoſtles, to have long ſpent his labours among his countrymen in Paleſtine, and to have ſhared in their ſufferings. The *Revelations* ſpeak of him as baniſhed to the Iſle of Patmos for the teſtimony of Jeſus; but where he chiefly lived, or where, or how he died, we have no authentic record. It is ſaid he was martyred at Epheſus, about three or four years after his return from baniſhment. (About An. 100.)

The tradition reſpecting this great Apoſtle, of his flying from Cerinthus the heretic in the bath, however juſtifiable abhorrence of an apoſtate from truth may be, comes through Ireneus after a third generation. Tertullian's caldron of boiling oil, from which he is ſaid to have eſcaped, appears alike apocryphal. Theſe ſuppoſititious miracles add nothing to the Church's glory. The Acts of the Apoſtles furniſh ſuch abundance—the conſtant miracle of tongues—the power of communicating the ſame miraculous gifts to others—render theſe traditionary, unſupported relations as doubtful as they are uſeleſs. They do but weaken inſtead of ſtrengthening the cauſe. Chriſtianity loſes nothing of its divine evidence, by our acknowledgment of the credulity, pious frauds, and fictitious records, which, through the weakneſs of ſome, and the wickedneſs of others, appeared very ſoon after the Apoſtles' days.

His

His purſuit of a youth, his convert, whom he recovered from robbers, and brought to repentance, has as little authenticity as the reſt, and is as needleſs. No doubt, numerous, and as ſingular converſions as this were wrought by the Apoſtle's miniſtry among young and old, as is by our own this very day. The ſtory may be true or falſe; it is trivial, and hardly deſerving a place in hiſtory.

Of two of the Apoſtles bearing the name of James, the one the ſon of Zebedee, and the other of Alpheus, called alſo the brother of the Lord, (Gal. i. 19.) we have the teſtimony of Luke that the firſt was numbered with the noble army of martyrs; and of Joſephus, that the ſecond followed his example.

JAMES, the ſon of Zebedee, fell one of the firſt victims to Jewiſh prejudice and enmity. To gratify the chiefs of the Sanhedrim, and thoſe under their influence, he was ſlain at Jeruſalem with a AN. 44. ſword. The account given Acts xii. makes no mention of his accuſer converted by him, and inſtantly executed with him. The traditions of Euſebius, the more they are examined the leſs ſtamp of authority they bear. The man who dared ſhed his blood for the teſtimony of Jeſus Chriſt muſt, by his zeal, labours, and ſucceſs in turning many from darkneſs unto light, and from the power

power of Satan unto God, have wrought converſions more and more ſingular than this late reported ſtory. Herod Agrippa, like other baſe and cruel politicians, thought theſe ſacrifices to popular reſentment a cheap way of reconciling the people to his tyranny.

The Lord's brother, the other James, was martyred, according to the account of Joſephus, during the change of Governors from Feſtus to Albinus, when the High Prieſt Annanus, ſeizing a moment of brief authority, cited and condemned him for blaſphemy, and had him immediately ſtoned on the ſpot. He was diſtinguiſhed by the title of *the Juſt*, the nobleſt a mortal can bear: and the univerſally admitted excellence of his character, made his execution to be abhorred and his murderer cenſured, even by thoſe who bore no good will to the Chriſtian name.

Of the labours and death of the other Apoſtles, hiſtory furniſhes no authentic materials. Tradition carries Thomas to the coaſt of Malabar; and tales as unſupported give others their ſeveral diſtricts; but I rather ſuppoſe the truth to be, that their lives were ſpent in preaching through Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, as it is evident, that, for a long time, the Goſpel was almoſt wholly confined to the Synagogue, and the Apoſtles devoted to the ſervice

vice of their Jewiſh brethren. The Diſperſion, which is marked as happening on the martyrdom of Stephen, ſhews, that except occaſional calls and excurſions, they had uſually kept together at Jeruſalem and its vicinity; and if we conſider the *myriads*, (Acts xxi. 20.) who in that city were called to the obedience of the faith, we ſhall ſee there was abundant employment for many zealous and faithful labourers.

A multitude of worthies have their names recorded in the Acts of the Apoſtles, whoſe itinerant labours, with thoſe of Paul, had the moſt powerful tendency to ſpread the Chriſtian faith. On theſe I am prevented from dwelling, leſt I ſwell a ſummary into a volume. One peculiar perſonage I would, however, not leave unnoticed, as having given occaſion to ſo much ſuperſtition and idolatry, without a tittle in the Book of God to countenance the abominable practice.

MARY,

The mother of Jeſus, is never once mentioned in the ſacred records after the day of Pentecoſt, and but once after his reſurrection. The compaſſionate Redeemer had commended her to the care of the beloved John, and he had taken her to his own houſe as his mother. She, with the other women, attended

attended the prayer meetings, with the Apoſtles, ſilent and undiſtinguiſhed in the crowd; and after that is heard of no more. Not a trace of any peculiar honour, or reſpect, appears paid to her memory, alive, or dead. She muſt have been at that time pretty far advanced in age, and not improbably finiſhed her race, not in her houſe at Nazareth or Loretto, careful of the ſacred porringer, but under the roof of her adopted ſon at Jeruſalem. She has been peculiarly marked as the *Virgin* Mary, and that ſhe was a *Virgin Mother* we have divine authority; but that ſhe continued ſuch, appears not at all probable. That Joſeph *knew her not before* ſhe brought forth her firſt-born ſon, ſeems to imply connubial union afterwards. There is not the leaſt ſcriptural reaſon for the contrary. Neither Joſeph nor Mary ſeem to have had explicit knowledge of the real dignity of the child born, and of the ſon given to them; however high their expectations of his future eminence might be; nor would this at all forbid their holy intercourſe in marriage. The ridiculous idea of the ſuperior ſanctity of a married pair living together in a ſtate of virginity, has not the ſupport of a word in the Bible, but the very reverſe is enjoined. The moſt diſtant ſuppoſition of the fact no where appears in the Evangeliſts, and it is too abſurd to be made an article of Proteſtant faith. Jeſus being mentioned as *her firſt-born*, though not concluſive as

to the argument, may well lead us to ſuppoſe there were other children: *The brethren of the Lord* are often mentioned, and though theſe may be regarded as relatives, ſtanding in a more diſtant line of conſanguinity, yet there ſeems no reaſon, as there appears no record to the contrary, why they ſhould not have been his uterine brothers. His ſiſters are mentioned alſo with his mother, Matt. xv. 37; and he himſelf ſpeaks of them all diſtinctly, as ſtanding towards him in the ſame real relationſhip, Mark iii. 35; and, I confeſs, I have not the leaſt idea of Mary being a character leſs eſtimable as a Mother than as a Virgin in any point of view; but rather the contrary, when we regarded her as the married wife of Joſeph; and, perhaps, after his death, of Alpheus. The progreſs and reign of ſuperſtition in the Chriſtian Church, has probably in no caſe been more horribly marked, than in the traditions invented, the honours paid, and the ſupremacy aſcribed to this good woman. But the hiſtory of the Church is throughout deformed with theſe unſcriptural inventions.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

ON THE NATURE AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, AS RECORDED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

I AM entering on a ſubject of perilous enterpriſe; the fierce contentions, and innumerable volumes which have been produced on the occaſion, betray at leaſt the violence of the different partiſans, if they do not caſt a deciſive light on the ſubject. Probably if we well weighed the eſſentials of Chriſtianity, and in the unity of one ſpirit, were above all things careful to maintain the bonds of peace, we ſhould come nearer together on every material point, and in leſſer matters bear and forbear; content to leave to others what we claim ourſelves, a right of examining the ſacred records, and depending upon the ſpirit of truth for divine aſſiſtance to lead us into all truth. The luſt of pre-eminence, the pride of life, and all the miſerable objects of this world's gain and advantages, wherever they ſeize on the mind, darken the underſtanding, and diſtort the organs of viſion. Hence the fruitful ſource of all the perverſion of the oracles of God.

That the Church of Chriſt was ſpread with the rapidity of lightning; in a very ſhort ſpace of time occupied the vaſt extent of the Roman Empire, and paſſed beyond its bounds into the moſt barbarous nations, we have the moſt concluſive evidence. That it had the moſt powerful obſtacles to contend with, from the various eſtabliſhed religions—the ſtrong hand of power—the whole of what is ſtiled wiſdom and philoſophy, is equally admitted. Its conqueſts therefore muſt have proceeded from the divine energy attending the promulgation of the Goſpel, and its own luminous evidence. For the perſons immediately employed in the work, conſidered in themſelves, were confeſſedly the moſt unlikely men in the world to have gained atttention, or procured converts; and unleſs the Holy Ghoſt ſent down from heaven, had qualified them for their work, and accompanied their word with demonſtration and power, how they ſhould have ever ſucceeded in their attempts ſeems utterly inexplicable. Even infidels themſelves muſt admit, that ſuch men producing ſuch effects, without Divine aſſiſtance, would be an event as contrary to whatever has yet happened in the world, as any of the miracles they are pleaſed to reject and ridicule.

Wherever the Goſpel was preached, and ſinners converted to God, churches were formed for the edification

edification of the body of Chriſt. The whole was conſidered as *one body*, and acknowledged no other head but their maſter Chriſt, and themſelves members one of another, actually influenced and animated by one ſpirit, really dwelling in the members, as in the head; without which, no individual could properly be called of the church, and no church have a place in the myſtical body, which muſt be *the union of all*, in one faith, as in one Lord. This I regard as the ſacred clue, which muſt lead us ſafely through the labyrinth of all eccleſiaſtical polemics, eſteeming it an invariable axiom, that no man belongs to *any Chriſtian Church* who has not *the ſpirit of Chriſt*, and *a fortiori*, that *no Church* has any pretenſions to be a living member of his body, which in its miniſters and members, is not found joined to the Lord in one ſpirit. A church, without evidence of the influence, and experience of the operations of the Holy Ghoſt, hath but a name to "live and is dead;" and whatever may be its forms, or however ſound its confeſſions of faith, it hath no more title to be reckoned *a Chriſtian Church*, than a ſtatue or a corpſe has to be eſteemed a living man.

The form in which the Church of Chriſt appeared in the beſt, the primitive age, under the immediate inſpection of the Apoſtles and Diſciples of the Lord, deſerves our conſideration. And here

drawing around me the ſacred circle, I wiſh to confine myſelf to the words of the Holy Ghoſt, without any regard to the traditions of men. And I ſhall begin at

JERUSALEM.

This was the fruitful womb from whence iſſued the noble army of Martyrs, Confeſſors, and Evangeliſts, who holding up the word of light, diffuſed the brightneſs of the glory of God the Saviour to the ends of the earth. Theſe were the fruit of our Lord's miniſtry during his labours in Judea, and its adjacent countries. They conſiſted of twelve men, firſt choſen, called Apoſtles, or perſons ſent: who were the conſtant attendants of Jeſus during his travels; the witneſſes of his miracles, and the auditors of his heavenly diſcourſes. To theſe were added ſeventy others, who were ſent out to preach and teach; but to the loſt ſheep of the Houſe of Iſrael only. They were all endued with miraculous powers, and on their return from their itinerancy through the nation, reported with triumph the wonders they had wrought. Whether theſe men and others who ſucceeded them, had the power of working miracles at their will, I doubt: I rather think they poſſeſſed it only on peculiar occaſions, and under a ſpecial impulſe from the Holy Ghoſt, directing when and what they ſhould do.

do. Theſe were of the loweſt order of the people. No ruler or Phariſee was found profeſſing faith in Chriſt; and if ſome really inclined to believe on him, or heſitated reſpecting his character, they dared not openly avow what they felt, leaſt they ſhould be put out of the Synagogue. Thus Joſeph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were only his diſciples ſecretly for fear of the Jews: by ſuch men, however, and ſuch means the moſt powerful effects were produced, and though the fruit of their miniſtry during the life of their Maſter little appears, yet a preparation was made for the reception of their teſtimony, when Jeſus glorified ſent down the mighty effuſion of his Spirit on the witneſſes whom he had choſen. Above five hundred brethren were ſummoned to behold our Lord's aſcenſion into Heaven: and we can hardly ſuppoſe that any real diſciple, capable of travelling, would be abſent on that occaſion. Of theſe, many who belonged to the more diſtant towns and villages probably returned to their own homes and families, expecting the great event which had been predicted; whilſt about an hundred and twenty abode at Jeruſalem, and with Mary, and the other women kept their ſolemn aſſemblies there for prayer and ſupplication, waiting for the promiſe of the Father when they ſhould be baptiſed with the Holy Ghoſt, as their Maſter had aſſured

them (Acts i. 4, 5.) *not many days hence.* In this interval the Apoſtles filled up their number by the admiſſion of Mathias into the room of Judas, and out of the two ſelected by ſuffrage after ſolemn prayer, and appeal to the Lord for direction, he was by lot numbered among the twelve to complete the ſacred college.

The glories of the day of Pentecoſt I ſhall paſs over, in order to reſt upon the bleſſed effects as they regard the Church, not dwelling on the miraculous powers communicated, but chiefly on the mighty influence of the Goſpel word upon the conſciences of men. In virtue of which the great additions were daily made of ſuch as ſhould be ſaved. Three thouſand believed the firſt day, and myriads followed them. (Acts xxi. 20.) Of theſe the whole body were of one heart and of one mind; ſteadfaſtly continuing in the Apoſtles' doctrine and fellowſhip, and in breaking of bread and in prayers, endued with ſuch a ſpirit of love and liberality as engaged a generous diſtribution of their ſubſtance: and though I apprehend no community of goods as a general right ever entered into any true Chriſtian's mind, yet the uſe of them became common by the ſpirit of thoſe who had poſſeſſions and ſold them, and diſtributed the produce among their diſtreſſed brethren as every man had need.

The

The immenſity of this body affords us two views of their church order.

1. As *neceſſarily* diſtributed into various congregrations; no *one* place being capable of containing ſuch *myriads*, nor any one Biſhop or Elder ſufficient to adminiſter the ſacred ordinances among them. We accordingly find them *breaking bread from houſe to houſe*, Acts ii. 46. *preaching and teaching in every houſe*, Acts v. 42. which ſeems to deſcribe the manner of the Church at Jeruſalem.

2. Theſe ſeveral *Houſe Churches* formed one united body under the preſidence of James, and not Peter, Acts xv. 13. He was at the head of the firſt council. To him Paul addreſſed himſelf, (Acts xxi. 18,) when all the Elders or Preſbyters being aſſembled by him, he reported to them the happy ſucceſs of his miniſtry among the Gentiles. The neceſſity of a preſident where ſo great a number of Elders reſided, and ſo many congregations were formed, ſeems as natural for the preſervation of order as it appears actually the caſe in this mother of all the churches. Rome as yet was wholly Pagan.

But many obſervances in the Church of Jeruſalem yet remained among the Jewiſh converts, never deſigned as a model for the Gentile churches. Theſe

Theſe were all zealous for the law, Acts xxi. 20. nor did they ſuppoſe themſelves exempted from any of its obligations. They kept the Jewiſh ſabbath, circumciſed their children, attended the temple worſhip and the ſynagogues, and in all things ſcrupulouſly followed the Moſaic ritual; probably with greater ſtrictneſs than their Jewiſh brethren. Yet, they maintained at the ſame time the doctrines of grace, met on the firſt day of the week for Chriſtian ordinances; and though they regarded the Jewiſh ceremonies as not yet abrogated, they looked for their acceptance with God, not from the deeds of the law, but from the righteouſneſs of faith. This is evident in Paul's ſubſequent converſation with Peter at Antioch, when he had cauſe to rebuke him; and he was to be blamed. Gal. ii. 15, 16. The middle wall of partition had not been yet taken down.

The care of the poor widows led to the inſtitution of Deacons. This originated in a complaint of real or ſuppoſed partiality in the diſtribution of the alms of the faithful to the native Jewiſh widows, in preference to the Heleniſts. Acts vi. 1. The Apoſtles being themſelves too much engaged to attend to theſe temporal concerns, recommended it to the Church to elect ſeven perſons for the diſcharge of this office. Theſe were accordingly choſen by general ſuffrage, not for *each ſeparate congregation,*

congregation, but for the *whole body*: and by the Apoſtles, after ſolemn prayer and impoſition of hands appointed to this ſervice.

Though the care of the widows was immediately entruſted with theſe, it prevented them not from being employed in other labours of love. Philip was an Evangeliſt, and Stephen a like zealous advocate for Chriſt and his cauſe. In conſequence of his boldneſs in the ſynagogue of the libertines, Acts vi. 9. the blood of this firſt martyr was ſhed by the fury of his bigot enemies: and a great and general perſecution following, all the principal diſciples were diſperſed, except the Apoſtles, who remained at Jeruſalem, Acts viii. 1. Theſe flying in different directions, every where preached the Goſpel, and with great ſucceſs through Judea, Galilee and Samaria, and ſome as far as Antioch, Damaſcus, Phenice and Cyprus, yet to none but *to the Jews only*.

The ſucceſs of Philip at Samaria, brought down to his aid Peter and John from Jeruſalem, confirming the ſouls of the faithful, and confounding the ſorcerer Simon Magus, by whom the people had been long ſeduced. A flouriſhing congregation with miraculous powers was there eſtabliſhed. On their return, the villages around enjoyed the fruit of their labours. They were

village

village preachers, highway preachers, and were not aſhamed.

A ſingular event contributed to convey the Goſpel to Ethiopia, by the ſudden converſion of a great perſonage of the court of Queen Candace, through the preaching of Philip, Acts viii. 26—38. Many ridicule *ſudden converſions*. But it will be found a bleſſed reality to this preſent day, that the *truly converted* in general can remember the time when, the place where, and the perſon by whom they were firſt called into marvellous light, and received the ſaving knowledge of their crucified Lord. The herd of Chriſtians who look to the pariſh regiſter for the date of their chriſtianity, are to be pitied for their ignorance; and thoſe ſtill more, who as blind lead the blind, and teach that the water of baptiſm which ſprinkles the infant, is all the regeneration he needs.

Hitherto the Goſpel Church had been confined within the Jewiſh pale, nor had the ſolitary inſtance of Cornelius, aſtoniſhing as it appeared, that on the Gentiles alſo the Holy Ghoſt ſhould be poured out, enlarged the ideas of the Apoſtles to expect, that on the heathen at large the light of Chriſt ſhould ſhine. The miraculous converſion of Paul, Acts ix, produced no alteration in this behalf. Though he preached bodly at Damaſcus the moment

moment his eyes were opened, it was only in the ſynagogues of the Jews, v. 29, and many years elapſed in labours in Arabia, Jeruſalem, Tarſus, Damaſcus and Antioch, before he received his commiſſion at his ſecond viſit to Jeruſalem as an Apoſtle to the heathen; and learned by an expreſs revelation from his bleſſed Lord, that the Gentiles were to be fellow heirs, and of the ſame body, and partakers of his promiſe in the Goſpel.

OF THE GENTILE CHURCHES.

The Gentile Churches were chiefly formed by the labours of Paul, and the itinerant Evangeliſts, his companions.

At Antioch a great number of perſons had believed and turned to the Lord, Gentile proſelytes as well as native Jews, through the miniſtry of thoſe who had been driven from Jeruſalem, Acts xi. 19. This intelligence reaching the Apoſtles, Barnabas was diſpatched to ſtrengthen their hands. The work exceedingly increaſing, he reſolved to go to Tarſus, and engage Paul as his aſſociate; and their united labours were crowned with ſingular ſucceſs. There firſt the diſciples diſtinguiſhed by their zeal and numbers, received the honoured, ſhall I ſay, or reproachful name of *Chriſtians*. The Greek word χρηματισαι Acts xi. 26, ſeems

ſeems to intimate that the appellation was from Heaven; but if their enemies gave it them as a term of reproach, they bound it as a diadem to their brow, and gloried to be called after the name as to reſemble the image of their Lord.

The neceſſities of the poor, the perſecuted, and numerous ſaints at Jeruſalem, led Barnabas and Paul thither with liberal contributions from Antioch. They could not but feel their obligations to thoſe from whom all their ſpiritual bleſſings flowed. This was the tribute, not to ſuperior dominion, or the exaction of authority, but the voluntary oblation of fraternal love, and the genuine expreſſion of communion, with their afflicted and ſuffering brethren, Acts xi. 28. And they received a rich reward, for now the divine commiſſion iſſued to level all diſtinction between Jew and Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free. Returning therefore to Antioch, the ſcene of their labours, the word of God under their miniſtry ran and had free courſe and was glorified, Acts xii. 24.

The *Church of Antioch*, Acts xiii. 1, is repreſented as *one* body, immenſe as the converts were, and favoured with Evangeliſts as numerous as eminent, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen brought up with Herod the Tetrarch and Saul. Theſe ſurely cannot be ſuppoſed to have employed all

all their labours in the *ſame congregation*, and much leſs to have been joint-paſtors of a *ſingle church*. I am rather induced to think, that *many* congregations were raiſed, though in the unity of *one* church.

But now the bleſſed time was come for a more general and glorious communication of the Goſpel to the Gentile world. It was no eaſy matter to break through Jewiſh prejudices. The Holy Ghoſt therefore eſpecially commanded to ſeparate Paul and Barnabas for the particular work, to which he had appointed them, Acts xiii. 3. Theſe with proper aſſiſtants immediately iſſued forth in the name of the Lord; and in a vaſt circle through Seleucia, Cyprus, Paphos, Perga, Antioch in Piſidia, abundantly enlarged the pale of the Chriſtian Church by their indefatigable labours. They chiefly at firſt confined themſelves to the boundaries of the ſynagogue; yet collected thither a numerous audience of Gentile proſelytes, ch. xiii. 43. The envy and enmity of the Jews burned like fire; they could not bear to ſee the whole city aſſembled to hear the word of God. Contradicting and blaſpheming, they ſought to prejudice the multitude againſt Paul and Barnabas; whilſt they waxing bolder, v. 46. under the perſecution, ſolemnly took their leave of thoſe who, rejecting the word of truth, counted themſelves unworthy of eternal

eternal life, and openly avowed their purpoſe henceforth of devoting themſelves to the ſervice of their Gentile brethren.

The ſtorm of bigot fury now broke upon them. The Jews inſtigated the rulers and their own devotees, to expel them from their territories: whilſt Paul and Barnabas left behind them the duſt of their feet, to witneſs againſt their perſecutors; and a multitude of diſciples filled with joy and the Holy Ghoſt, to be their crown and glory in the day of the Lord Jeſus. v. 52.

The ſame ſucceſs, and the ſame bitterneſs of Jewiſh malice attended them at Iconium. ch. xiv. 1. A while they firmly maintained their ſtand, v. 3. till enmity being rouſed to violence, a meditated aſſault to ſtone them compelled their removal to Derbe and Lyſtra, and the adjacent parts of Lycaonia, which by this means enjoyed the preaching of the Goſpel-word—The wrath of man ſhall praiſe thee. Perſecution often tends to ſpread the truth it meant to deſtroy. Here the miracle of the impotent man's cure expoſed them to a ſcene of intended honour, more terrible than all their reproaches; but where the heart is unrenewed, thoſe who were ready to worſhip them one day, are inſtigated to murder them the next. The ſame inveterate Jews purſued them from Antioch and Iconium

Iconium to Lyſtra, ſtoned the venerable Paul, and left him for dead; (Acts xiv. 29.) but his work was not done, and till then he was immortal. A miraculous reſtoration to life and ſoundneſs enabled him to depart for Derbe, to plant a new church there; and then undiſmayed, to return through the former ſcenes of his ſufferings, confirming the faithful called by his miniſtry, and providing for their edification comfort and ſtability, by ordaining *elders in every church* with prayer and faſting. (Acts xiv. 23.) Returning through Piſidia and Attalia, they arrived happily at Antioch, communicating the glad tidings of their ſucceſs, and of the Gentile Churches, which they had planted. I can only obſerve here, that I find, in all theſe widely diſperſed and numerous congregations, no mention made of any appointment but that of *preſbyters*, all cemented in one bond of union, under the ſuperviſal of the great itinerant evangeliſts.

The contention raiſed at Antioch by the Judaizing Chriſtians, (Acts xv. 1.) compelled Barnabas and Paul to go up to Jeruſalem, in order to conſult with the Apoſtles and Elders on this important queſtion, Whether Gentile Churches and Converts from the Heathen, were ſtill bound by the Moſaical inſtitutions. At Jeruſalem the cauſe was ſolemnly diſcuſſed before James, who preſided,

and all the other apoſtles, elders, and brethren; and according to the unanimous ſuffrage of the aſſembly, James pronounced a definitive decree in favour of Gentile liberty from the yoke of bondage. The letter directed, (Acts xv. 27.) in the name of the Apoſtles, Elders and Brethren, to the Church of Antioch, for ever ſettled the controverſy. Thus often unforeſeen good ariſes from evil intentions fruſtrated.

Though James was not ſuperior to Peter or the other Apoſtles, at Jeruſalem, he had been evidently appointed to fill the place of preſident as *primus inter pares*. Yet, neither he, nor any of his apoſtolic aſſociates, aſſumed to themſelves authority to decide, but by the ſuffrage of the whole body of the Church, under immediate divine direction. All arrogant pretenſions of a few to lord it over their brethren were then unknown.

The report of the converſion of the Gentiles cauſed great joy in all the churches, and to all the brethren, as Paul and Barnabas paſſed to Jeruſalem; whilſt the decree, which they carried back to Antioch, afforded ſingular ſatisfaction and conſolation to the Gentile converts. After a conſiderable ſtay at this favoured city, Paul and Barnabas planned a new excurſion to viſit the churches, which they had planted, and to encreaſe their numbers;

numbers; when a trivial diſpute, wrought up into paſſion, ended in a breach, which ſeparated them for awhile (Acts xv. 39.); but probably the Lord overruled this alſo for good, and the churches were more profited by their diſtinct labours, than if they had travelled in one company. It is beautiful to obſerve the fidelity with which the ſacred hiſtorians relate the faults of the greateſt and beſt of men. The treaſure is in earthen veſſels, that the excellence of the power may be ſeen to be of God, and not of us.

Paul ſeems to have been in the right in his objections to Mark, however his warmth might be faulty; and to have gone forth with the particular approbation of the brethren; and to *his* travels, Luke the hiſtorian, his companion, confines himſelf. Syria and Cilicia were firſt viſited by him, confirming *the churches*. Acts xv. 41. Derbe and Lyſtra were next bleſſed with his labours; and Timothy, a favoured ſpiritual child of the Apoſtle, choſen for his travelling companion. Being a Jew on his mother's ſide, Paul circumciſed him, in order, it ſeems, to render him more acceptable, or leſs obnoxious at leaſt to the Jewiſh brethren. Of his conduct in this matter, I have feared, whether it may not be placed to the account of a too worldly compliance. Paul was a man like others, compaſſed with infirmities; probably the firſt of

human beings, but ſtill of like paſſions with his fellows.

By this viſitation the churches were eſtabliſhed, and encreaſed in number daily. Acts xvi. 5. None had yet claimed a monopoly, or ſuppoſed the church in the next town and village to be leſs a true Church of Chriſt than themſelves. They were hitherto, all, *one in Chriſt Jeſus.*

Phrygia, and the regions of Galatia, afforded a plenteous harveſt, and were filled with flouriſhing churches. And now God, who is ſovereign and the guide of all our ſteps, defeated their own intentions, and in a viſion directed them to a new ſcene of labours and uſefulneſs. They therefore croſſed the ſea to Greece; and Philippi, the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a Roman colony, arreſted their attention. There Lydia was their firſt-fruits; and when ſome intereſted maſters, of a pythonic or fortune-telling damſel, in reſentment for the loſs they ſuſtained, (Acts xvi. 19.) excited the multitude, and denounced them to the magiſtrates; the ill uſage which they received, and the priſon to which they were committed, only ſerved to turn the houſe of the jailor into a little Bethel, by the wondrous and inſtantaneous converſion of himſelf and all his houſhold.

The

The Epiſtle, ſhortly after written to this Church, ſhews it to have conſiſted of *many congregations*, furniſhed with *biſhops* and *deacons:* Phil. i. 1. The Epiſtle to the Galatians is addreſſed to *the Churches*, probably on a ſimilar model. Our ideas are deluſive, when we ſuppoſe *primitive churches* have a reſemblance to more modern ones. Pride, power, and pre-eminence, had not yet ſhed their baneful influence over theſe apoſtolic congregations; and though ſuperiority of gifts, zeal, and uſefulneſs, muſt ever have raiſed ſome above their fellows, they only became more eminent examples to the flock, inſtead of aſſuming dominion over their brethren. It is evident the biſhops at Philippi, and in the churches of Galatia, could only have had the ſuperintendance and care of a very ſmall flock. Philippi itſelf not being the metropolis even of a little province, the Chriſtians in it could bear but a ſmall proportion to the whole. They were generally alſo of the poorer ſort, though no church manifeſted nobler liberality than the Philippians, ſending once and again to the relief of Paul when in priſon. Their biſhops therefore muſt have been confined to a very reſtricted ſphere; nor could it be otherwiſe, if the biſhop attended to the minuteſt tranſactions of the church over which he preſided: examined the catechumens, held the love-feaſts, and knew intimately every member of his flock.

Paul's character, as a Roman citizen, being now diſcovered, procured his diſcharge from the goal of Philippi, at the requeſt of the magiſtrates who had committed him; but who began to fear being called to account for the illegal abuſe of their power; expreſſing no reſentment of his ill-uſage, he took his leave of the brethren and departed. Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Theſſalonica, ſucceſſively ſhared his labours. The latter place appears to have eminently profited by his preaching; and, as was uſually the caſe, his ſucceſs exaſperated his Jewiſh enemies, and a tumult drove him to Berea by night, to eſcape his perſecutors.

The church formed at *Theſſalonica* he ſalutes in two Epiſtles, addreſſed generally *to all the holy brethren*, without any diſtinction of perſons; nor is there the leaſt mention of any church-rulers in either of the Epiſtles. We may conclude, indeed, that in this capital of Macedonia, he ordained, as in other churches, preſbyters, or biſhops, (1 Theſſ. v. 12.) names that at firſt appear to have been ſynonimous, as the moſt elderly perſons were uſually preferred to be the overſeers of the flock, and the teachers of their younger brethren. The high commendation given of the exemplarineſs of this church ſpeaks to their honour; and the tender concern expreſſed for them, 1ſt. Epiſt. Theſſ. chap.

ch. iii. 6. marks how near they lay on the Apoſtle's heart.

BEREA next received the Goſpel; and their noble candour in the ſearch of the Scriptures, was crowned with a divine conviction of the truth, and a numerous hoſt of converts; but the ſame enmity being there excited by his inveterate enemies the Jews, Paul was ſent off ſecretly to Athens to wait the arrival of his leſs obnoxious brethren, who probably tarried behind to put their church matters into the uſual order for edification, before they joined the Apoſtle.

His ardent ſpirit could not but be moved at the groſs idolatry he beheld; and his conſcious ſuperiority challenged the conflict with the proud philoſophers, and even confounded the Areopagites, leaving ſome ſolid proofs of his ſhort miniſtry, in that ſeat of learning and the muſes; but it was at Corinth, whither he next migrated, that the Lord, having *much people*, ſent one to call them out of darkneſs into marvellous light. The amazing progreſs of the Goſpel, encouraged a long continuance of his miniſtry there. Soon driven from the ſynagogue, the Gentiles welcomed him, and a plenteous harveſt crowned his labours. That heathen wilderneſs budded and bloſſomed as the roſe.

To this flouriſhing church we have two Epiſtles; great gifts adorned them, but great diviſions were introduced by falſe brethren; and great offences afforded much ſcandal to the Chriſtian world. To correct, to reform, to rebuke, to inſtruct, to edify, appears the Apoſtle's object. The firſt Epiſtle is addreſſed to the *Church* at Corinth, with all that in every place call on the Lord Jeſus. The ſecond includes *the ſaints which are in all Achaia*; who probably conſtituted a part of the ſame body. Their power to judge their own members is ſuggeſted, ch. iv. 12; and their obligation to excommunicate impenitent tranſgreſſors enforced, v. 15. Every church had a right to exerciſe diſcipline, to admoniſh, to cenſure, or expel from the ſociety of the faithful. Anti-chriſtian pains and penalties of ſpiritual courts were yet unknown.

All the members were to join in *communion*, ch. x. 25. after ſelf-examination, v. 28. I ſee no trace of a written or oral experience delivered to the congregation. This is the commandment of men; a creditable converſation is all the Church can demand. It is his own damnation if a man eats and drinks unworthily; and ſuch there were among them, v. 30.

In this church it appears that *all* might preach and prophecy, ch. xiv. 24; and it is evident by the

the effects produced on ſtrangers who came in during their worſhip, that ſome were convinced and converted hereby. This therefore being ſo deſirable an object, a wiſe regulation is enjoined reſpecting the preachers; that they ſeek the edifying of the Church, and ſpeak to be underſtood, ch. xiv. 12; but if one uſes a tongue not generally known, another muſt interpret it to the audience; and if there be no interpreter he muſt be ſilent, v. 28. Thus two or three at every act of worſhip may inſtruct, whilſt the reſt ſit, by and judge, v. 29. ſo that at different times, *all one by one*, may communicate and receive edification, v. 31. no church-ruler appears to controul this liberty, nor his licenſe aſked. And I can ſee no ſcriptural reaſon or injunction to hinder *any man*, with the approbation of the congregation, from ſpeaking for their inſtruction. The excluſion of women, v. 34. from becoming public teachers, ſeems to admit the right of any man who is qualified and approved; and this qualification every Chriſtian brother, v. 39. ſhould covet earneſtly to obtain. Origen, when a layman thus preached, even before biſhops in the third century.

The churches of Galatia, are propoſed, ch. xvi. 1. as a model for the Corinthians. A weekly ſum, according to every man's income or ſucceſs in buſineſs is enjoined, to be laid aſide for charitable uſes;

uſes; a practice highly laudable, and worthy the obſervation of all churches, and every member of them.

Stephanas and his houſehold, having devoted themſelves to the miniſtry, are commended to their regard: and Timothy, v. 10. who was then itinerating.

The Epiſtle appears dated at Epheſus, and not Philippi, as our poſtſcript ſuppoſes; nor does it ſeem to have been ſent by Timothy, who was travelling, but by ſome other perſon.

Aquila and Priſcilla then reſided at Epheſus; and wherever they abode, opened their houſe for worſhip, and had a church therein.

The ſecond Epiſtle contains little relative to church-order. Titus (ch. vii. 6.) appears to have been with the Apoſtle at Philippi, and not a reſident at Crete, his ſuppoſed dioceſe, any more than Timothy at Epheſus. They were itinerant evangeliſts, who went about preaching every where. On Paul the general ſuperintendence of the Gentile churches lay. Ch. xi. 27. Peter's peculiar charge was the circumciſion, Gal. ii. 7.

But to return to Paul's travels:

From

From Corinth Paul took ſhipping for Syria, and himſelf obſervant of the Jewiſh ceremonies not yet vaniſhed away, had ſhorn his head at Cenchrea, having a vow. And haſtily paſſing through Epheſus, he proceded by Cæſarea to Jeruſalem, and thence to Antioch. After ſome ſtay in that favoured place; he reviſited the churches of Galatia and Phrygia, and returned to Epheſus, where the eloquent Apollos had found inſtructors in Paul's companions, Aquila and Priſcilla, and after profiting that church by his labours, paſſed to Corinth, to water the ſeed ſown by the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles.

At Epheſus, Paul continued about two years, ſpreading the Goſpel through all Aſia; firſt addreſſing his Jewiſh brethren, and being by them rejected, he removed to the ſchool-room of one Tyrannus, probably a Gentile convert, and there taught with power and demonſtration of the Spirit, the truth as it is in Jeſus. Many miracles were wrought by him, and wonderful effects produced by his miniſtry, (Acts xix. 19.) inſomuch that the craftſmen perceiving the famed Diana's temple greatly deſerted, and their gains diminiſhed, raiſed a tumult from which Paul was preſerved by the prudence of his friends; and the conſequences that were apprehended prevented by the wiſdom of the town-clerk. Yet as the place was become too dangerous

dangerous to abide there, he departed again for Macedonia, diſtant from this ſeat of diſorder; and paſſing through Greece, where he had before planted the Goſpel, after three months ſtay he returned to Syria, through Macedonia, accompanied by a variety of friends attached to him; and his fellow-helpers in the work. From Philippi he embarked for Troas. There after a few days ſtay, and the miraculous recovery of Eutycus, he walked to Aſſos, where his companions took him on board, and ſailed to Mitylene; and after paſſing viſits at Samos and Trogyllium, he arrived at Miletus. Thither he ſummoned the Elders of the Epheſian Church, and after a ſolemn and affecting charge took his laſt farewell.

To this Church was addreſſed that heavenly epiſtle, which is ſtill extant, directed *to all the Saints and faithful in Chriſt Jeſus*, it is equally applicable to them in the preſent, as in the primitive days. One thing in the conſtitution of that church ſtrongly marks the titles of preſbyters and biſhops as there ſynonimous; that he charges the elders to be watchful of the flock, over which the Holy Ghoſt had made them biſhops, Acts xx. 28. I cannot avoid obſerving, that he can be no preſbyter or biſhop, whom the Holy Ghoſt has not made ſuch. No appointment of man can make him a miniſter of the ſanctuary, whom God

the

the Spirit hath not inwardly moved, and conſecrated for his own work.

The different titles under which the miniſters of the church are diſtinguiſhed, ch. iv. 11, 12. give no preciſe view of their character or numbers. He mentions Apoſtles, Prophets, Evangeliſts, Paſtors, and Teachers, all active for the edifying the body of Chriſt. But what was the appropriate work of each is not explicitly declared.

A prophetic impreſſion, that he ſhould ſee Rome, (Acts xix. 21.) was accompliſhed now in a way that he knew not. No warnings could deter him from viſiting Jeruſalem. Having ſailed from Miletus to Coos, Rhodes and Patara, he landed at Tyre, and from thence went by Cæſarea to Jeruſalem. There, in compliance with James's recommendation, he was fulfilling a part of the Moſaic ritual, reſpecting vows, in order to ſhew that he continued to obſerve the law. Whether he owed it ſuch a compliance, I have ever doubted; this and his circumciſing Timothy have appeared to me temporiſing. But Paul probably is right, and I am wrong. The Jews of Aſia obſerving him in the temple, pretended profanation, and raiſed that commotion, which, after all the danger to which he became expoſed in his ſeizure, impriſonment, and lying in wait

wait of the Jews, compelled him, after a long confinement, in which he found no juſtice would ever be done him in Judea; to claim his privilege as a Roman citizen, and appeal to the hearing of Auguſtus.

His apology to the people, his defence before Felix, his beautiful diſcourſe to Agrippa and his court, all ſpeak a language that cannot be read without admiration and ſenſibility. His voyage to Rome, diſaſtrous in the higheſt degree, afforded a noble evidence of his courage and compoſure; and to him God gave all who ſailed with him in the ſhip, who owed their eſcape from the ſhipwreck to his counſels, and the care and keeping of his covenant God. Wherever he went he communicated bleſſings, and diſplayed the miraculous powers with which he was inveſted. Melita had reaſon to bleſs God for his arrival, and for the benefits conferred on the bodies and ſouls of its inhabitants, Acts xxviii. And when at laſt his voyage terminated at Rome, he was received with the reverence and affection, for which his epiſtle had paved the way; and in which is left a golden treaſure to the Church of Chriſt, that will communicate bleſſings to the lateſt ages, greater than thoſe enjoyed even by the perſons to whom it was immediately addreſſed.

Vaſt

Vaſt and momentous as the contents of this epiſtle are in every view, I cannot diſcover a trace reſpecting the outward regimen of the church: and as little can I glean from the epiſtle to the Coloſſians: The perſons addreſſed are *the ſaints and faithful brethren in Chriſt.* Epaphras, one of their teachers, is entitled our dear fellow labourer and faithful miniſter in Chriſt. And the congregation to which Archippus miniſtered is enjoined to watch over him, and remind him of his duty. Clerical dominion had not yet entered into any man's idea. And nothing can more deciſively prove the ſmall importance of the mode of church government than that ſo little mention is made of it, and ſo little can preciſely be aſcertained from all the epiſtles. We ſhall ſee that the ſpirit and temper with which the miniſters of Chriſt muſt be endued, are moſt explicitly deſcribed. Their titles, names, or authority, are of trivial import compared with their devotedneſs, heavenly mindedneſs, and readineſs to ſpend and be ſpent on the ſervice of their faith.

His two favoured ſons, Timothy and Titus, were his chief companions, and greatly employed by him in the regulation of the congregations, which had been raiſed by his labours; as well as to reſiſt the judaizing teachers, who were the conſtant diſturbers of the peace of the Gentile churches.

The

The poſtſcript of the firſt Epiſtle, calls Timothy the firſt Biſhop of the Church of the Epheſians; but there is no ſuch title given him by Paul, nor any intimation of his being at Epheſus; but as one of the great itinerant evangeliſts, the companion of Paul, and deputed by him to aſſiſt in bringing the congregations into a regular order for worſhip and diſcipline.

From the 2d Chap. 1ſt Epiſt. I collect, that prayers, ſupplication and interceſſion for all men, and eſpecially for kings and magiſtrates, were to be offered up—no form is preſcribed. This ſeems to be left to the miniſter, only that thoſe who preach and pray be *good men*, and that women be excluded from public miniſtrations.

It is ſuppoſed, (ch. iii.) that it was lawful and a good work to deſire the office of a biſhop; ſo much labour, danger, ſelf-denial, and exemplarineſs of conduct, being neceſſarily attached to it, and every earthly conſideration renounced by thoſe who addicted themſelves to the miniſtry of the ſaints. Had Timothy been a biſhop of the Church of Epheſus, as aſſerted, the encouragement given to others to devote themſelves to epiſcopal ſervices there, manifeſts a ſtate of epiſcopacy very different from what we find at preſent generally eſtabliſhed. The biſhops here ſpoken of, were evidently the elders

elders of congregations, (ſee Tit. i. 5. compared with v. 7.) who by ruling well their own houſes, had given ſatisfactory evidence of their ability to preſide in the Church of God. Their qualifications are clearly and ſtrongly deſcribed, (chap. iii. 8—11.) and deſerve the moſt ſolemn attention of every miniſter of Chriſt, whatever ſtation he may fill.

It is evident Timothy was ſtill but a youth, (chap. iv. 12.) and whatever office he ſuſtained, or with whatever gifts endued, he received them by the laying on of Paul's hands, and of the preſbytery. 1 Tim. iv. 14. Did preſbyters then ordain biſhops? Or, were the terms ſynonimous? That he was left at Epheſus, with ſuperintending authority, where there were *many biſhops*, is evident. 1 Tim. i. 3. He was enjoined to encourage and honour thoſe who preſided over the congregations well; and eſpecially ſuch as were moſt active and laborious in preaching and catechiſing, (v. 18.) Reſpecting ordination, he was to lay hands haſtily on no man, and without partiality or perſonal reſpect admit none into the miniſtry, but after proper examination and conviction of their call and qualifications. He was alſo cautiouſly to receive, and impartially to weigh accuſations, againſt the elders, who ſhould give public offence, and pronounce the cenſure due to their unfaithfulneſs. Acts ſtrongly

marking ſuperior juriſdiction; and I hence infer, that particular churches neither ordained nor cenſured their own miniſters, though they elected and recommended; and if faulty, accuſed them by two or three witneſſes, before the great itinerant evangeliſts.

Paul's firſt impriſonment at Rome continued two whole years; but he eſcaped out of the jaws of the lion, Nero, and left a bleſſed manifeſtation of his bonds in the palace, as well as in every other place. In his ſecond Epiſtle to Timothy, he appears returned again to the houſe of his priſon at Rome, and ready to be offered up on the altar of martyrdom. He had detached his faithful itinerant helpers to a variety of ſervices—Creſcens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia, whilſt Timothy himſelf had been left in Aſia, from whence he was ſhortly to proceed to Rome with Mark, who had once departed from the work, but now had returned to the labours and dangers of itinerancy. The principal ſubject of the Epiſtle is the dying charge of the great Apoſtle to his beloved ſon, reſpecting his own teaching and conduct, and worthy the moſt attentive conſideration of every biſhop or preſbyter upon earth.

Titus, next to Timothy, ſeems to have been peculiarly dear to Paul, and one of his moſt laborious

borious aſſiſtants. He traverſed the vaſt regions, where, by the labours of the Apoſtle and his companions, churches had been formed, in order to compleat the regulations generally eſtabliſhed, and to ordain in the ſeveral congregations ſuch as were qualified for the ſacred miniſtry, according to the apoſtolic deſcription, ch. i. 6—8. Men of the beſt report and moſt exemplary conduct, of which the church to which they belonged muſt neceſſarily be the moſt competent judges. Theſe *preſbyters*, v. 5. are called *biſhops*, v. 7. their office and qualifications being apparently the ſame. But though this truſt is committed to Titus, it no where appears that he was himſelf more the Biſhop of Crete than of Dalmatia, (2 Tim. iv. 10.) or of Nicopolis, (Tit. iii. 12.) nor had any fixed reſidence or dioceſe, he being one of the great itinerant evangeliſts who went about preaching *every where*, in ſeaſon, out of ſeaſon. And therefore, as ſoon as he had ſettled the Cretan Church in the moſt edifying manner, he was ordered to come and winter with Paul at Nicopolis, and Artemas or Tychicus ſhould be diſpatched to fill his place in the Cretan congregations.

A general ſuperiority in all the churches, which they viſited, appears to have been exerciſed by theſe great evangeliſts, though none appear ſtationary in any one place. They ordained, cenſured,

regulated, were the cementing bond of the different churches, maintaining a unity of order and procedure through the whole. They all bore the name of Apoſtles, (2 Cor. viii. 23.) were every where received with reverence, and obeyed with filial affection. They aſſumed no dominion over the faith, but were helpers of the joy of the faithful wherever they went. The gifts, abilities, zeal, which they diſplayed, with every divine temper which adorns the Chriſtian miniſtry, could not but give them weight, and procure them eminence, by whatever name they might be diſtinguiſhed; and in every Chriſtian church, in the very nature of things, ſuch men muſt poſſeſs ſuperiority, whatever be its conſtitution. Even where the moſt abſolute parity is eſtabliſhed, to theſe their fellows naturally give place. They are the preſidents in all aſſociations; heard with reſpect, commanding obedience; capable of ſwaying the deciſions of their brethren; conſulted in all difficult circumſtances; and placed foremoſt in the hour of danger. To them is entruſted the care of eleemoſynary diſtributions, for the benefit of the body to which they belong; and in private and public all cede to them the ſeat of honour. If we conſidered *things* inſtead of *names*, we ſhould have leſs diſpute and more union. There are bigots in all denominations of Chriſtians. Tyranny and intolerance eccleſiaſtical, are in every church the mark of the beaſt;

beaſt; but wherever union and order are beſt maintained, there ever were, and ever will be, call them by what title you pleaſe, men ſuperior to their fellows in office, and admitted to be ſo. In the primitive Church this ſuperiority veſted in the apoſtles and their companions, the great itinerant evangeliſts, Barnabas, Silas, Artemas, Tychicus, Trophimus, Titus, Timothy, and many others; *chief men among the brethren.*

In all the directions given throughout this epiſtle, the regulations of Titus's perſonal conduct and miniſtrations form the principal ſubject, and exactly correſpond with thoſe given to Timothy. Indeed it could hardly be otherwiſe, men placed in ſimilar ſituations were called to act under the ſame principles, and to employ the ſame means.

The ſhort epiſtle to Philemon was written on account of Oneſimus his ſlave, who had deſerted his ſervice, and is ſuppoſed to have robbed his maſter. Coming to Rome, like London, the ſink and receptacle of all wickedneſs, and of thoſe who need concealment, he there in the myſterious ways of Providence, was led to hear the Apoſtle Paul, whom probably he had ſeen at his maſter's houſe. Curioſity moſt probably incited him to attend his priſon preaching; and being now effectually called and converted to God, he devoted

himſelf to Paul's ſervice. But however much he needed ſo aſſiduous an attendant, the Apoſtle judged it right to ſend him back to Coloſſe, his maſter's reſidence; and Oneſimus readily returned to make the ſurrender of himſelf to Philemon's diſcretion; Chriſtianity never aboliſhed the right of the maſter to his ſlave. The only trait reſpecting the Church contained in this letter, is the intimation that it was aſſembled under Philemon's roof, and edified by his miniſtry and that of Archippus, whom Paul honours as *his fellow ſoldier*, united with him in the care and ſuperintendance of the ſame congregation. He expreſſes his hope of ſhortly viſiting Philemon, when releaſed from his preſent confinement, and beſpeaks himſelf a lodging with his ſpiritual child, v. 22.

Thus have I collected, as far as I know, with ſimplicity and truth, without bias or partiality to any of our preſent modes of church government, whatever the Scripture contains reſpecting the regulation of the Gentile Churches under Paul's eſpecial care, chiefly planted by his labours, and watered by his word and his epiſtles.

The Epiſtle to the Hebrews, though not bearing his expreſs ſubſcription, is generally adjudged to be his. A ſingle ſentence, (ch. xiii. 7.) inculcating obedience and love towards thoſe who have the rule

rule over them, and have ſpoken unto them the word of God, is all I can find relative to church government; and at leaſt affords a negative proof of how little importance the outward forms and adminiſtration in the church are, compared with holding the head Chriſt, and believing the glory of his perſon and ſacrifice. If the unfounded idea that Biſhops, Prieſts and Deacons, were ever to ſucceed to the High-Prieſt, Prieſts and Levites, here ſurely we muſt have found ſome intimation of it. That men of reſearch can broach ſuch puerilities is ſurpriſing.

The other epiſtles are equally barren on this ſubject. That of James addreſſed to his Jewiſh brethren throughout the world, is wholly employed in practical directions, without a word on the nature of the Goſpel Churches or their government. The elders are only once mentioned as praying over the ſick, ch. v. 14. Indeed I am fully aſſured, if we walked more cloſely with God, and were more deeply concerned about our perſonal ſalvation in the exerciſe of faith working by love, and prompting to every good word and work, we ſhould be much leſs bigotted to modes and forms. A truly gracious man will be much more attentive to the *building*, that he may be the habitation of God through the Spirit, than to the *ſcaffolding*. In every church, Lutheran or Reformed,

Epiſcopalian, Preſbyterian, or Independent, it is of infinitely more moment for every member of each to "prove that he is born of God," and to feel that his Spirit witneſſeth with our ſpirits, that we are the children of God, than to which of theſe denominations of Chriſtians we may be joined in outward church-fellowſhip.

The epiſtles of Peter directed to the Gentile converts, (1 Ep. ch. ii. 10.) enter little or nothing into the ſubject of church government, forms or officers. The firſt of them is wholly employed in the great object of ſetting forth Jeſus Chriſt and his glorious ſalvation, and in building up the ſouls of the faithful on him, the ſure foundation, other than which can no man lay. I enter not into the particulars contained in this epiſtle, wiſhing only to recommend an attentive peruſal of Archbiſhop Leighton's Commentary, as one of the books, which next to the ſacred oracles themſelves, breathes a language moſt highly congenial with the text it elucidates. One verſe or two only deſerves to be noticed. (1 Ep. ch. v. 12.) In this Peter claims no precedence or priority above his fellows, ſatisfied with announcing his own office and character as himſelf a *preſbyter*; addreſſing his brethren under the ſame title as *preſbyters*, and exhorting them as his fellow-labourers to diſcharge their *epiſcopal* duty towards the ſeveral flocks over whom

whom the Holy Ghoſt had made them overſeers, not by conſtraint but willingly, not for filthy lucre ſake, but of a ready mind, not affecting lordly dominion over their allotted congregations, but being examples of the flock. Then when the Arch-paſtor ſhould appear, an amaranthine crown of glory would be their full reward. He well knew the human heart, and how much need the greateſt and beſt of men had to be cautioned againſt the one, and to be exhorted to the other. The fatal effects of neglecting theſe admonitions have been ſince ſufficiently experienced.

The ſecond epiſtle, ſtill more general in its addreſs, (ch. i. 1.) hath not a word relative to the ſubject of church government; like its very ſimilar epiſtle of Jude, it contains ſolemn warnings againſt ſeducers and falſe teachers, who (ſuch is the corruption of man) even in thoſe early days had inſinuated themſelves into the aſſemblies of the ſaints. With the moſt lively exhortations he urges them to live as men, who expected the coming of their Lord, and to walk ſo as we have him for our example; becauſe he can belong to no church, and much leſs have any pretenſions to be a miniſter of Chriſt, who is not a partaker of the like precious faith with us; whoſe effects in mortification of ſin, deadneſs to the world, and diligence to make our calling and election ſure, muſt prove its reality;

reality; and demonſtrate that our Chriſtianity is not in word and in tongue, but in power and in the Holy Ghoſt, and in much aſſurance.

The works of one eminent, inſpired man, remain to be conſidered, in reference to this ſubject. His extended life muſt have nearly cloſed the century. He was a confeſſor, and perhaps a martyr. His epiſtles, like his goſpel, are deſigned to diſplay the glory of him which was from the beginning. Having imbibed from him the ſpirit of love, he inculcates this eſſential proof of diſcipleſhip; and that we ſhould manifeſt to others, and enjoy ourſelves, the certain aſſurance, that we are of God; and that we dwell in him, and he in us by his Spirit, which he hath given us. In his ſecond and third epiſtles, he aſſumes no higher title than the *preſbyter*: The *Church* of which he makes repeated mention, appears to have been one of thoſe houſe-congregations, over which Diotrephes had aſſumed dominion, expelling from it (v. 10.) thoſe itinerant brethren who travelled about preaching the Goſpel; whom Gaius had kindly received, but Diotrephes treated them with abuſe; reviling the Apoſtle John himſelf, who had ſent them, and uſing his influence to make a party in the Church, and prevent others who would have welcomed them from entertaining them. The Apoſtle declares his intention ſeverely to animadvert on ſuch

ſuch a conduct at his next viſit, and not leave his inſolence unrebuked; probably like many a purſe-proud profeſſor ſince, his wealth and weight in the Church overawed the members, and no one dared openly reſiſt what many in ſecret condemned.

The laſt work of this great Apoſtle, the Revelation communicated to him in the Iſle of Patmos, and tranſmitted by him to the Aſiatic Churches, will cloſe the canon of Scripture, and finiſh the records of Divine authority. The inſpired penman is directed to ſend theſe words of warning to the ſeven Aſiatic Churches in particular; and aſſumes no other title, than *your brother, and companion in tribulation.* The ſeveral churches are addreſſed in the perſon of their *Angel*, which is a term of office, ſignifying meſſenger. Theſe angels, or meſſengers of the churches, were to proclaim the glad tidings of ſalvation to the people. When any matters relative to their church required advice or correction, they were ſent to conſult Paul or the other Apoſtles, and were often employed by him (2 Cor. viii. 23.) to regulate what was amiſs. In theſe awful epiſtles contained in the book of the Revelations, the great Head of the Church encourages, commands, exhorts the faithful, and threatens himſelf to inflict deſerved puniſhment on the refractory and diſobedient. The angel denounces the warnings of his Lord; the arbitrary impoſitions

impoſitions and puniſhments of men had yet found no place in the Church of God; to exhort, reprove, rebuke with all long-ſuffering and doctrine, was all that angels were empowered to do.

Thus, to the beſt of my ability, I have endeavoured plainly and fully to place in view, the ſcriptural account of the nature and adminiſtration of the Church of Chriſt, as drawn from the ſacred ſource of unerring truth. I am perfectly ſure, I neither mean or deſire intentionally the leaſt miſrepreſentation or concealment, but earneſtly pray to follow the ſimplicity which is in Chriſt; and diveſted of partiality and predilection, to deſcribe, and be united with the true Church of the living God.

Had the *mode* of church government been as eſſential to ſalvation, as the doctrine of the atonement, or the agency of the Holy Ghoſt, it would aſſuredly have been as explicitly ſtated; but, when we find it ſo little expreſsly defined—the ſubject treated in ſo indiſtinct and curſory a manner—when ſo little ſtreſs appears to be laid upon it—and when men equally wiſe and good, after inveſtigating the matter with ſingular ability and diligence, remain ſtill of different opinions, I truſt we may ſafely conclude, that the claims of mutual forbearance are infinitely ſtronger than the pretenſions

pretenſions of any *excluſive church.* That the *outward adminiſtration* of church order muſt be a much leſs important concern, than all our various denominations have ſuppoſed—and, that the *inward bleſſings* enjoyed in the conſcience, conſtitute the eſſence, and fill the volume of the ſacred records. Every believer in Jeſus, who is a partaker of the grace of God in truth, is a member of the true Church, to whatever particular denomination of Chriſtians he may belong; and popes, biſhops, preſbyters, paſtors or deacons, without this are but the limbs of Antichriſt, and of the ſynagogue of Satan; and can belong to no church, which the great Shepherd and Biſhop of Souls will acknowledge for his own.

To ſum up in a few words a ſubject which has been ſo fearfully abuſed, in order to ſubſerve the purpoſes of pride, bigotry, and worldly-mindedneſs, I conclude

1. That as ſoon as a little ſociety was formed of Chriſtian men, a room was opened for their aſſembling, and the moſt apt to teach appointed to miniſter to them in holy things.

2. He was a man of gravity, generally of the more aged, married, and having a family, approved by

by his fellows, and willing to devote himſelf to their ſervice.

3. His appointment was ſignified by prayer and impoſition of hands of the Apoſtle Paul, or ſome of the itinerant evangeliſts and the preſbytery; and without this I meet no ordination.

4. Every church exerciſed diſcipline over its own members, to admit, admoniſh, or expel.

5. Before theſe itinerant evangeliſts all accuſations againſt offending preſbyters were brought—They, in conjunction with the congregation, regulated matters of order, and corrected abuſes.

6. Theſe ſeem not to have had any appropriate diſtrict, but went about *every where*, chiefly under the direction of the Apoſtle Paul.

7. Theſe great evangeliſts were uſually ſupported by the churches; but often, like Paul, maintained themſelves by their own labours. During the firſt ages, the miniſtry was not appropriated to gentlemen or ſcholars. No man was bred to it as a profeſſion, or went into it for a maintenance. They were paſtors of a different ſtamp.

8. The

8. The ſtationary preſbyters or biſhops during the lives of the Apoſtle and his aſſociate evangeliſts were under their ſuperintendence. But it will appear very early in the ſecond century, when this firſt race of great itinerants departed, that one among the miniſters in every place began to have the name of *biſhop* και εξοχην, with preſbyters his coadjutors, acting with him as one body.

9. All eccleſiaſtical officers from the beginning, and for the firſt three hundred years, were elected by the people. Even Mathias was thus choſen to fill up the tribular number of the Apoſtles.

10. Deacons were inſtituted for the care of the poor, eſpecially the widows; and deaconeſſes afterwards appear for the ſame purpoſes, though their inſtitution is not expreſsly marked in the ſacred canon. Originally they were ordained not for one congregation, but for the myriads at Jeruſalem, whoſe widows were provided for out of a common ſtock.

Laſtly. *Every* member of the primitive Church ſeems to have made it a conſtant practice to lay aſide weekly a certain portion of his income or gains, for the poor, the perſecuted, or the Goſpel, according to his ability; and hence, though generally the Chriſtians were of the loweſt and moſt indigent

indigent claſs of the people, the riches of their liberality abounded, and their means for this aroſe from their Chriſtian character itſelf. Their *induſtry* was great, and they waſted nothing in *extravagance* of any kind, being by principle ſelf-denied to all indulgences for themſelves, that they might have to give to him that needed. And if all real Chriſtians more conſcientiouſly obſerved this rule ſtill, it is amazing what a fund might be raiſed for the relief of the neceſſitous, and the furtherance of the Goſpel.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

THE PERSECUTIONS MENTIONED IN THE SCRIPTURE.

THESE were principally from the Jews, and the reaſon of this is evident; for, in Judea, the principal civil magiſtrates, as well as the high prieſt and church rulers, were Jews: and where the concurrence of the Roman governors was neceſſary, they had generally influence to engage them to act according to their wiſhes. Thus even Pilate was prevailed upon, contrary to his own convictions, to condemn our Lord to death; and Felix, though fully convinced of Paul's innocence, when he quitted the province, in order to curry favour with the Jews, left Paul in chains, and in priſon.

As at firſt, for many years the Chriſtian miniſtry was confined to the Jews and the ſynagogue: Chriſtians, who diligently obſerved the Moſaic ritual, could not be eaſily diſtinguiſhed from their brethren, and would generally be conſidered as Jews by the heathen. But their peculiar obſervances—the declaration of their faith in Jeſus of

Nazareth—their obſervance of the firſt day of the week—and above all, their zeal to propagate the doctrines of faith and ſalvation by Jeſus Chriſt; with that diſtinguiſhing excellence and purity of conduct, which, whilſt it reproached thoſe around them, was accompanied with the moſt ſolemn warnings that they muſt periſh or repent—all theſe things could not but engage the attention, and excite the enmity of their neighbours. Accordingly we ſee them preſently expoſed to bonds and impriſonment, to ſcourging and inſult, on the firſt attempts to preach and teach Jeſus Chriſt. The ſpoiling of their goods gratified the avarice as well as enmity of their perſecutors; and Judea in conſequence became the ſcene of great diſtreſs and poverty. This was relieved by a liberal diſtribution of what the more wealthy there poſſeſſed; and afterwards by moſt generous contributions from all the Gentile churches. We have information of many acts of violence committed, and there were many more, no doubt, which are not recorded. If Saul, breathing threatenings and ſlaughter, made ſuch havock in the church, entering every houſe of Chriſtians, and haling men and women, committed them to priſon, (Acts viii. 3.) moſt probably others at Jeruſalem copied his example. We know the zeal of Stephen expoſed him to a cruel death. He led the noble army of martyrs. James ſucceeded him under Herod Agrippa; and

Peter

Peter only eſcaped by miracle. Nor were diſtant cities exempt from the like perſecutions, as is evi dent from the commiſſion with which Saul was inveſted to Damaſcus.

Nor did the Roman government, however in its nature little diſpoſed to perſecute on account of religious matters, withhold its hand from violence; or properly diſcountenance the tumults and oppreſſions, which the Jewiſh zealots, the rabble multitude, and intereſted Pagans, were continually exerciſing againſt the Chriſtians. From what is recorded in the Acts of the Apoſtles, we may conclude, what was the caſe in other places, where a like conduct would awaken the ſame enmity; and bonds and impriſonment await thoſe who dared witneſs againſt falſe religion, or rebuke alike the wicked conduct of Jews and Gentiles.

The very nature of real Chriſtianity, however peaceable in all its principles, cannot, through the corruption of man, but excite the ſtrongeſt oppoſition; and when we ſpeak of peace, rouſe all whom it reproves to aſperity and battle. And, where only weakneſs and non-reſiſtance were on one ſide, and power equal to their malice and enmity on the other, it is impoſſible in the nature of things, but that the conſequences ſhould enſue which are recorded, and abundantly more than

would be noticed, as the accounts of the ſufferings in one place would be only the counterpart of the ſame in all others. And how widely the Chriſtian faith was diſſeminated, no man can diſpute. The ſufferings and the martyrs therefore, I conclude, were abundantly more numerous than any record has preſerved. And the perſecution of all that would live godly in Chriſt Jeſus, great and univerſal.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

HERESIES AND SCHISMS.

IT muſt be that offences come. Even during the days of the Apoſtles themſelves, there were many Anti-chriſts—ſuch are the dire effects of human corruption: and permitted, that thoſe who are truly approved and faithful, may be made manifeſt.

The firſt and moſt continued cauſe of diſpute in the Chriſtian Church, was the error and bigotry of Jewiſh zealots, enforcing upon Chriſtians the neceſſity of the obſervance of the Moſaic ritual, in order to ſalvation; and thereby ſapping the foundations of *juſtification by faith alone*, that eſſential article of the true Church from the beginning. The conformity of the apoſtles and firſt diſciples to the Jewiſh œconomy, from which, as circumciſed, they did not think themſelves emancipated, naturally gave a ſtrong handle to thoſe who were zealots for the antient religious rites of their fathers, to ſuppoſe that they were binding upon all men; and that every Chriſtian muſt be circumciſed and keep the law of Moſes. The Acts of

the Apoſtles; the Epiſtle to the Galatians; where theſe ideas had occaſioned peculiar diſputes and diviſions; the ſame ſubject diſcuſſed in the Epiſtle to the Romans; and introduced almoſt into every one of Paul's epiſtles, ſhew how far the evil had extended; how dangerous he eſteemed it; and how carefully he guarded the Chriſtian Church againſt it. And as good often ariſes eventually out of human corruption, to this we are chiefly indebted for the preciſe and clear views of goſpel grace; of the glories of the redemption, which is in Jeſus Chriſt; of the free juſtification of every ſinner, as ungodly, *by faith only*, without any conſideration of his works or deſerts; and conſequently the ſecuring the praiſe of the ſalvation to him alone, who, by an obedience to death, even the death of the croſs, hath obtained eternal redemption for us, and hath opened the kingdom of Heaven to all believers. The zeal, the warmth expreſſed in the ample diſcuſſions, into which the Apoſtle entered on this ſubject, are a concluſive evidence of its importance. After the moſt ſolemn conſideration of the matter at Jeruſalem, a decree iſſued to all the Gentile churches, containing the unanimous deciſion of the apoſtles, preſbyters and brethren; condemning the diſturbers of the Gentile churches; and the attempt to impoſe a yoke abrogated and unneceſſary; recommending only in a few particulars, a conduct ſuch as mutual charity

charity dictated; in order to maintain a happier intercourſe between the Jewiſh and Gentile Chriſtians; approving of Barnabas and Paul, and the doctrine which they had taught; and adding to them Judas and Silas, who, in perſon and diſcourſe, ſhould confirm them in the truth, which theſe apoſtles of the Gentiles had maintained againſt the ſelf-righteous and judaizing teachers.

Another cauſe of ſchiſmatical evil appeared alſo early, eſpecially in the Corinthian Church, through perſonal attachment to particular men, and a degrading and reviling ſpirit towards others, to the diſturbance of the peace of the faithful, and the great hinderance of the Goſpel. A factious teacher in the pride of pre-eminence, in order to exalt himſelf, debaſed his brethren, and often deceived the hearts of the ſimple and unwary, drawing away diſciples after him; and weakening the hands of the apoſtles themſelves. Againſt theſe men, Paul eſpecially guards them. But nothing herein can be applied to thoſe who withdraw themſelves from *falſe teachers*, whoſe doctrine is heretical, and whoſe lives are contrary to their holy profeſſion; who have only taken the overſight of the flock for lucre; have neither the choice nor approbation of the faithful; and however they may maintain the form of godlineſs, deny the power of it: from ſuch

turn away. Separation from theſe men and their churches, is not ſchiſm but duty.

The doctrine of the reſurrection of the body was one of the firſt great truths diſputed by the reaſoners in religious matters. Some affirming that there was no reſurrection from the dead; and others, that it was paſt already; as if the doctrine was merely ſpiritual and allegorical, and related not to the reality and identity of the ſame body being raiſed from the grave. The matter is diſcuſſed and the hereſy confuted, 2 Tim. ii. 18. 1 Cor. xv. paſſim.

John, who ſurvived the reſt of the Apoſtles, obſerves and cenſures other hereſies lately broached in the church. Againſt the doctrines of the Nicolaitans, he gives a ſolemn caution. (Rev. ii. 15.) This ſeems to have been an error of the ſame nature with that, to which Paul often alludes, the introducing philoſophical ideas to explain away Chriſtian myſteries, eſpecially reſpecting the perſon of God our Saviour—aſcribing to ſpeculative knowledge an imaginary value—making Chriſtianity a religion of the head inſtead of the heart: and therefore ſuppoſing the profeſſion of it compatible with a general conformity to the world and its manners; permitting the occaſional participation of

of idol ſacrifices, and other corrupt practices, in which the heathen indulged themſelves.

In the ingenious volume of Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, of the Rev. Mr. Newton, there is an admirable chapter on ancient hereſies, and a noble defence of evangelical truth againſt thoſe who in the preſent day endeavour to load with obloquy and abuſe the revivers of evangelical doctrine. Had he purſued his work, it would have rendered my labours unneceſſary. But the Church of God will never want defenders, and will always, and only be found, where the practice of righteouſneſs and true holineſs, the fruit of the faith once delivered to the Saints, demonſtrates, that her members ſtand not in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God.

SECT.

SECT. II.

END OF THE FIRST, AND COMMENCEMENT OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

CHAP. I.

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH, FROM THE CLOSE OF THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE, TILL THE END OF THE REIGN OF TRAJAN.

WE are ſtepping from the blaze of day into the regions of doubt and twilight. The moment we quit the oracles of truth, we are left to grope our way through the feeble glimmerings of works, which have been handed down through a ſucceſſion of ages; whoſe authenticity has been diſputed by ſome, and which by more have been charged with interpolations; theſe with traditionary reports ſuſpicious on account of the diſtorted medium through which they have paſſed, leave us under the neceſſity of treading every ſtep with caution; examining with care, and as far as I can truſt

truſt my convictions, obliged oftener to doubt than believe.

The Apoſtles are ſaid to have diſperſed after the firſt council held at Jeruſalem. But I much queſtion whether the moſt of them did not live and die among their brethren in Paleſtine. Certainly the accounts given of ſome of them are little deſerving of credit. We know they conſidered their miniſtry as chiefly if not wholly to be employed in the ſervice of their Jewiſh brethren. On Paul and his aſſociates the care of all the Gentile churches reſted.

It ſeems clear by generally admitted evidence, that the Church of Chriſt had widely ſpread its conqueſts, and continued in a conſtant rapidly progreſſive ſtate; nor hitherto to have ſuffered any general perſecution from the Roman government. Probably the poverty of the primitive Chriſtians was their protection, as affording little for the gratification of avarice. They were alſo at firſt confounded with the Jews, who enjoyed perfect toleration. They excited alſo the leſs, the attention of government, as being of the lower order of men; not many wiſe, not many mighty, not many noble being called. Hence, they were ſcarcely ever noticed by any author of that day. And when they are firſt mentioned, the account given of them

ſhews

ſhews how little acquaintance was gained of their character, or procedures. The reports of the Roman hiſtorians contain only the malignant abuſe of ignorant ſlander.

The greateſt number of Chriſtians were in the cities, though they ſpread alſo into the adjacent villages. But their aſſemblies in any one place at firſt could not have been very numerous, except at Jeruſalem, as a ſingle room in a private houſe uſually contained them. They continued increaſing through the indefatigable labours of the itinerant evangeliſts, and by the zeal of many others, excited to activity in their ſeveral ſpheres, to teſtify the Goſpel of the grace of God to all around them.

No ſooner had Paul eſcaped out of the mouth of the lion Nero, than he probably viſited the churches, as his epiſtles intimate he intended to do. Returning again to Rome, whether as a priſoner of ſtate, or ſeized on during a viſit to that church, he is ſuppoſed to have fallen in the firſt great maſſacre of the Chriſtians under that bloody tyrant. This monſter raiſed up for the ſcourge of a guilty world, having for a while through the influence of his tutor Seneca given auſpicious hopes of his government, degenerated by degrees into the baſeſt of beings and the crueleſt of men. A vaſt conflagration at Rome in the tenth year of his reign,

AN. 64. reign, ſaid to be kindled by his own order for the pleaſure of gazing on the deſolations which the flames would make, irritating the Roman people, he endeavoured to exculpate himſelf by caſting the odium on the innocent Chriſtians. The account of the admirable hiſtorian Tacitus, however his own prejudices therein appear, affords a moſt valuable material for our hiſtory. Speaking of Nero, and the conflagration of Rome, he ſays, "To divert ſuſpicion from himſelf, he ſubſtituted fictitious criminals, and with this view, he inflicted the moſt exquiſite tortures on thoſe men, who under the vulgar appellation of *Chriſtians*, were already *branded with deſerved infamy*. They derived their name and origin from CHRIST, who in the reign of Tiberius had ſuffered death, by the ſentence of the procurator, Pontius Pilate. For awhile this *dire ſuperſtition* was checked; but it again burſt forth; and not only ſpread itſelf over Judea, the firſt ſeat of this *miſchievous ſect*, but was even introduced into Rome, the common aſylum, which receives and protects whatever is *impure and atrocious*. The confeſſions of thoſe who were ſeized, diſcovered *a great multitude* of their accomplices, and *they were all convicted*, not ſo much for the crime of ſetting fire to the city, as for *their hatred of human kind*. They died in torments; and theſe were embittered by inſult and deriſion. Some

"were

" were nailed on croſſes, others ſewn up in ſkins
" of wild beaſts, and expoſed to the fury of dogs:
" others again ſmeared over with combuſtible ma-
" terials, were uſed as torches to illumine the
" darkneſs of the night. The gardens of Nero
" were deſtined for the melancholy ſpectacle, which
" was accompanied by a horſe race, and honoured
" with the preſence of the Emperor, who mingled
" with the populace in the dreſs and attitude of a
" charioteer. *The guilt of the Chriſtians deſerved*
" *indeed the moſt exemplary puniſhment*, but *the public*
" *abhorrence* was changed into commiſeration, from
" the opinion that theſe unhappy wretches were
" ſacrificed, not ſo much to the rigour of juſtice,
" as to the cruelty of the jealous tyrant."

We cannot read this account without being ſtruck with the multiplied and horrible executions, made of theſe innocent but devoted victims. Indeed lying under ſuch *public abhorrence* and *general odium*, as a ſect *miſchievous, impure, atrocious*; *branded* with *deſerved infamy*; their *guilt* calling for the *moſt exemplary puniſhment*; it was impoſſible that the arm of vengeance ſhould not be lifted up over them. I am amazed any man can admit the truth of theſe prepoſſeſſions againſt them, and afterwards ſuppoſe, as Gibbon does, that the executions were inconſiderable.

We

We know how congenial theſe horrid orgies and ſpectacles were to the taſte of that ſavage people, and how readily the magiſtrates indulged them in the exhibition. The deteſtable character of which the Chriſtians ſtood *convicted* by the very name they bore, ſuppoſes them unworthy even of pity, and deſerving the *abhorrence* of mankind.

I cannot here but obſerve how little credit is due to the reports of the enemies of Chriſtianity, when an hiſtorian of the high character which Tacitus has obtained, makes ſuch a repreſentation. Throughout the whole, evidently unacquainted with the ſubject of which he treats, and of the people whom he deſcribes; and as much the dupe of credulity, and the ſlave of prejudice, as the meaneſt of the Pagan rabble.

The edicts of Nero againſt the Chriſtians lying under ſuch imputations, and ſtanding convicted in the eyes of their enemies of every charge laid againſt them, could not but be put by the magiſtrates into rigorous execution. The objects were ſo generally and deeply abhorred; the Emperor ſo incenſed againſt them; the order ſo preciſe, and his own example ſo ſtrongly before their eyes, that every man to whom the charge was given, muſt conſider their activity a recommendation to his favour. Nothing can be more diſingenuous, and

and contrary to every fair deduction of reaſon, than Mr. Gibbon's repreſentation of this matter. He affects to make light of it, and becauſe we have no particular records preſerved, how far, and how greatly this perſecution extended, he would preſume it was confined within the walls of Rome, and the martyrs comparatively few. But Tertullian in that caſe, would not in his apology have hazarded an aſſertion, which muſt, if falſe, have been ſo eaſily confuted, that the perſecution raged through the provinces of the empire. And, indeed, they who ſuppoſe in the exiſting circumſtances, and conſidering the odium under which the Chriſtians lay, that the Emperor's edicts would ſleep, or not be carried into effect, muſt be very ignorant of human nature; ſtrangely credulous, or wilfully malignant. Even Nero's reign continued nearly four years longer. In ſuch a man-tiger as Nero, it is hardly to be ſuppoſed the thirſt for blood would abate; and during four years of perſecution, to how many miſerable victims muſt it have been fatal?

A ſelf-inflicted death delivered the world from the monſter, and the Chriſtians from this bloody ſcourge. The ſhort and turbulent reigns of his ſucceſſors, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, kept the Romans too occupied in their own quarrels, to at-

tend to the riſing ſect. This interval of peace gave the Chriſtians a reſpite from their paſt ſufferings, and time to prepare for the future. An. 68—69.

An. 70. The deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the utter ſubverſion of the Jewiſh polity under Titus, is among the memorable events clearly foretold, and awfully verified. The Chriſtians, conſcious of the approaching cataſtrophe, and it is ſaid, particularly warned of God to remove from the devoted city, fled to Pella, and eſcaped from the deſtruction.

An. 81—95. During the preceding reigns, we have no particular accounts of the ſuffering church, though moſt probably the fire of perſecution went not out; but under the ſecond Nero, Domitian, the brother and ſucceſſor of Titus, it raged with redoubled fury. By him, it is thought, the Apoſtle John was ſent into baniſhment at Patmos: and in the Eaſt, where he chiefly abode, the Chriſtians were expoſed to all the miſeries which malignant hatred and arbitrary power can inflict on helpleſs innocence. Yet did the circle of Chriſtianity extend on every ſide, and the blood of the martyrs proved a bleſſed ſeed, productive of more abundant fruits.

Nerva

AN. 96. Nerva is ſaid to have ſuſpended the ſanguinary edicts of his predeceſſor, and after a ſhort reign of two years, the government AN. 98. devolved upon Trajan, the friend of Pliny, and eſteemed the moſt humane and excellent of all the Roman Emperors. Yet under him we have one of the moſt authentic monuments of the fearfully ſuffering ſtate of the Chriſtian world. When ſuch men as Trajan and Pliny, famed for mildneſs, prudence, and philoſophy, diſplayed a ſpirit ſo very oppoſite to theſe pretenſions, what muſt have been the caſe in general? To thoſe who know the principles of true Chriſtianity, and the nature of proud unhumbled man, the explication is not difficult why Trajan ſhould be as perſecuting as Nero, and though in a way leſs apparently ſavage, with an enmity more rooted, and with a perſeverance more obdurate; to make the obſtinacy of Chriſtianity bow to his imperial mandates, or be cruſhed by the weight of his indignation.

The ingenious Pliny had been appointed by Trajan to the government of Bythinia; and in the exerciſe of his office as proconſul, the Chriſtians, againſt whom the ſeverity of preceding edicts evidently ſubſiſted, were brought before his tribunal. Not having had occaſion to be preſent at any ſuch

examinations before, the multitude of the criminals, and the ſeverity of the laws againſt them, ſeem to have greatly ſtruck him; and cauſed him to heſitate how far he ought to carry them into execution, without conſulting firſt the Emperor himſelf; who, I think, had put him on the purſuit; having probably heard of the rapid progreſs of Chriſtianity, and imbibed all the prejudices againſt it, which the miſrepreſentations of its enemies; the contempt of the wiſe; the craft of the prieſthood; and the general odium of all pagan idolaters, could not but have propagated. A tranſlation of the letter itſelf will throw more light upon the ſtate of the Church, than perhaps any other monument of antiquity, which has reached us. Of the genuineneſs of the letters of Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, there are doubts: though perhaps unfounded; of the letters of Pliny and Trajan, I never heard any entertained; and being the teſtimony of an enemy, they afford the moſt irrefragable proof. We may ſafely conclude Bythinia was not ſingular for the number of converts, or the ſpirit of perſecution; and if ſuch means as the philoſophic Pliny employed againſt Chriſtianity, were only repeated through the governments of Aſia, the number of victims may eaſily be conceived.

A. D.

A. D. 107. "C. PLINY *to the Emperor* TRAJAN, *wiſhes health.*

"SIRE,

"It it uſual with me to conſult you in every matter wherein I am in doubt, and to ſubmit to your determination; for who better than yourſelf can direct me when I heſitate, or inſtruct me where uninformed? Till now I never had occaſion to be preſent at any criminal proceſs againſt the Chriſtians: I am ignorant therefore to what extent it is uſual to inflict puniſhment, or urge proſecution. I have much heſitated alſo, whether there ſhould not be ſome diſtinction made between the young and old; and in the application of the torture, whether there ſhould not be a difference between the robuſt and the delicate—whether pardon ſhould not be offered to penitence; or whether an openly profeſſing Chriſtian ſhall be allowed to retract, in order to eſcape puniſhment; whether the profeſſion itſelf is to be regarded as a crime, however innocent in other reſpects the profeſſor may be; or whether the crimes attached to the name, muſt be proved, before they are liable to ſuffer.

"In the interval, my method with the Chriſtians who have been impeached as ſuch, has been this:

I interrogated them, are you Chriſtians? If they avowed it, I aſked the ſame queſtion a ſecond and a third time, threatening them with the puniſhment decreed by the law: if they ſtill perſiſted, I ordered them to be executed on the ſpot; for, whatever their profeſſion of religion might be, I had not the leaſt doubt that ſuch perverſeneſs, and inflexible obſtinacy, certainly ought to be puniſhed.

"There were others infected with this madneſs, who, being Roman citizens, I adjudged to be tranſported to Rome for your immediate cognizance.

"In the diſcuſſion of this matter, accuſations multiplying, a diverſity of caſes occurred. A ſchedule of names was ſent me by an unknown accuſer; but when I cited the perſons, many denied the fact, that they were, or ever had been Chriſtians: and repeating after me the uſual formula, addreſſed the Gods, and offered ſupplications with wine and frankincenſe to your image, which, with the ſtatues of other deities, I had ordered to be produced, adding their maledictions of Chriſt, to which no real Chriſtian, I am aſſured, by any torments could be compelled. Theſe therefore I thought proper to diſcharge.

"Others

"Others named by an informer, at firſt acknowledged themſelves Chriſtians, and then denied it; pretending, that though they had been ſuch, they had renounced the profeſſion, ſome for three years, others for a longer time, and a few for more than twenty. All theſe adored your image and the ſtatues of the Gods, and at the ſame time called Chriſt an accurſed object.

"From their affirmations I learned, that the ſum of all their offence, call it fault or error, was, that on a day fixed they uſed to aſſemble before ſunriſe, and ſing together in alternate reſponſes hymns to Chriſt, as a deity; binding themſelves by the ſolemn engagements of an oath, not to commit any manner of wickedneſs; to be guilty neither of theft, nor robbery, nor adultery: never to break a promiſe, or keep back a depoſit, when called upon. This ſervice being concluded, it was their cuſtom to ſeparate, and meet together again for a repaſt, promiſcuous indeed, and without any diſtinction of rank or ſexes, but perfectly harmleſs: and even from this they had deſiſted, ſince the publication of my edict, forbidding, according to your orders, all clubs and aſſociations.

"For farther information, I thought it neceſſary, in order to come at the truth, to put two damſels, who were called deaconeſſes, to the torture; but

I could extort nothing from them but the acknowledgment of a ſuperſtition, depraved as immoderate; and therefore, deſiſting from farther inveſtigation, I haſted to conſult you; for, indeed, the matter appeared to me deſerving the moſt attentive conſideration, eſpecially in the view of the immenſe numbers of thoſe who are involved in this dangerous predicament; for informations are already brought againſt multitudes of all ages, of all orders, and of both ſexes; and more will be impeached, for the contagion of this ſuperſtition has not only widely ſpread over the cities and villages, but reached even the farm houſes. I am of opinion, however, that it may yet be ſtopped and corrected; for it is evident that the temples, which I found nearly deſerted, begin to be frequented; and the ſacred ſolemnities, that for a long while had been ſuſpended, are come again into practice: ſo that now there is a briſk ſale of victims for ſacrifices, where before there ſcarcely could be found a purchaſer. From whence I cannot but conclude, that the bulk of the people may be reclaimed, if impunity be allowed to repentance."

The reply of Trajan to Pliny, I ſhall ſubjoin, as caſting a fuller light upon the ſubject, and enabling us from both, to form very clear views of the ſtate of the Chriſtian Church at that time.

TRAJAN

TRAJAN TO PLINY.

"MY DEAR PLINY,

"You have certainly followed the right track, in the diſcuſſion of the cauſes, relative to the impeachment of the Chriſtians. No certain rule can be laid down, invariably to be adhered to in all caſes. They are not to be hunted up by informers, but if impeached and convicted, let them be executed: only with this reſtriction, that if any perſon deny that he is a Chriſtian, and demonſtrate it by offering ſupplication to our Gods, however ſuſpicious his conduct may have been before, his penitence ſhall ſecure his pardon. But unleſs every information has the accuſer's name annexed, whatever be the crime charged, it is not to be regarded; as it would be a precedent of the worſt ſort, and totally contrary to the maxims of my government."

Theſe letters appear to give a wonderfully complete view of the ſtate of Chriſtianity, and the dreadful perſecutions to which the faithful were expoſed. For I apprehend the character of theſe witneſſes ſtands ſo high with our modern infidel philoſophers, that we ſhall not be accuſed of bringing a partial evidence when we produce Trajan and his proconſul: and that the concluſion is fair and indiſputable, that under other emperors and other

other governors the Chriſtians would not meet with more liberal treatment.

1. In the firſt place, it is evident, by the laws then in force, that it was *a capital crime* for any man to be a Chriſtian; and that nothing elſe was neceſſary for his inſtant execution, than his own confeſſion; or conviction by evidence of the fact; or even his refuſal to commit an act of idolatry when accuſed, in order to his exculpation.

2. It is as clear that the humane Trajan and the philoſophic Pliny appear not to entertain a doubt of the propriety of the law, or the wiſdom and juſtice of executing it in all its fulneſs. Pliny confeſſes he had ordered ſuch capital puniſhment to be inflicted on *many*; chargeable with no crime, but their profeſſion of Chriſtianity; and the Emperor confirms the juſtice of the ſentence, and enjoins the continuance of ſuch executions, without exception in favour of any, who did not apoſtatize, curſe the Lord Chriſt, and worſhip the idols of paganiſm.

3. After the moſt exact enquiries, even from the apoſtate Chriſtians themſelves, without a diſcordant voice or ſuſpicion of miſrepreſentation, never was a teſtimony ſo noble, and unequivocal, given to the excellence of the Chriſtian character; of their piety, purity,

purity, and peaceable conduct; their happy communion with each other; and the innocence and exemplarineſs of their lives before all men. So that by the confeſſion of theſe apoſtates themſelves, no man could belong to this holy community, whoſe outward walk and converſation did not adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. And all this is confirmed in the ſtrongeſt manner by the very means uſed to extort a different repreſentation. It is horrible to report ſuch ſcandalous perverſion of the ſacred name of juſtice! Even delicate women are put to the torture, in order to try if their weakneſs will not betray them into accuſations of their brethren. But not a word, not a charge can be extorted, capable of bearing the ſemblance of evil or crime. To worſhip Chriſt their God; to meet for praiſe and prayer, and mutual inſtruction; to form engagements to abſtain from every evil word and work; to be examples and reprovers of that wicked and adulterous generation; to celebrate the ſacred myſteries of their faith in the participation of the ſupper of the Lord; and the repaſt of Chriſtian fellowſhip, which attended it—theſe are the *depraved ſuperſtition*, the *execrable crimes*, which nothing but a Chriſtian's blood can expiate. I feel *a holy exultation*, whilſt I record ſuch indiſputable evidence of tranſcendent excellence, and ſuch martyrs for Chriſtianity. There muſt

muſt be ſomething divine in that doctrine, even our enemies being judges, that can enable men thus to live, and thus to die. I feel a *ſacred horror*, whilſt I behold ſuch characters as Pliny and Trajan embruing their hands in innocent blood, and decreeing ſuch atrocious judgments againſt perſons ſo amiable and juſt, even by their own acknowledgments.

4. I would remark the evidence of the ſingular peaceableneſs of the Chriſtians, and their great care to give no offence, but to ſubmit even to the moſt unjuſt requiſitions. Their immenſe numbers might have engaged them to ſtand on their defence, ſuppoſing, what cannot be reaſonably queſtioned, Pliny's own repreſentation. Perſons of all ranks, of every age and ſex, had been converted to Chriſtianity. The body was ſo vaſt, as to leave the pagan temples a deſert, and their prieſts ſolitary. Scarce a victim was ever brought, or a ſacred ſolemnity obſerved, through the paucity of worſhippers. The defection from paganiſm muſt have been wonderfully general and ſtriking, which could have produced ſuch effects. But the Chriſtians neither abuſed their power to reſiſt government; nor acted with the leſs modeſty in their worſhip; careful not to bring down upon themſelves unneceſſary ſufferings. They knew the edicts againſt them, and

and aſſembled, to avoid offence, before break of day in their ſeveral congregations, at the houſes of the faithful. And when Pliny made a freſh promulgation of Trajan's bloody edicts, they for a while yielded to the ſtorm, and deſiſted even from their love-feaſts and general communion, if not from congregational worſhip.

5. I may add, that a more unequivocal evidence cannot be given of the Godhead of Chriſt, as univerſally admitted in the firſt ages of the Church. The heathen, who knew the import of ſinging hymns to their deities, could not but regard the perſon to whom ſuch hymns were addreſſed, as really and truly God in their eſtimation. And the contraſt of the Chriſtian worſhip was not ſtronger, reſpecting the object of their devotion, than the manners of the men who offered it. *They* ſurely knew the import of their own praiſes and prayers. Could they have adored a man, they would not have found ſuch reluctance to caſt a pinch of frankincenſe on the altar before the image of Trajan, in order to ſave themſelves from torments and death, in all its moſt tremendous forms. Our modern deiſtical and ſocinian Chriſtians would have been leſs ſqueamiſh. But theſe dared not to deny the only Lord God, even our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. And whom they worſhipped with their lips

as

as confeſſors, they glorified with their deaths as martyrs.

6. It is awful to conſider the teſt to which the Chriſtians were brought, and the fearful evidence which appeared, how many had aſſumed the name of Chriſtian, and deſerted paganiſm, who had never drank into the ſpirit of vital Chriſtianity: and therefore, when perſecution for the word's ſake aroſe, they fell away from their profeſſion, and made ſhipwreck of faith and of a good conſcience. Though the martyrs were many, the apoſtates were more. That the martyrs were numerous, the declarations of Pliny, what *he had done*; and the orders of Trajan, what *he ſhould do*, can leave no manner of doubt. And we have concluſive evidence of the power of God in ſupporting his people under every ſuffering and terror, in the very damſels who were tortured. Death had been a leſs evil for theſe than the rack. The ſuffering there had been momentary. If the feebler ſex ſet ſo noble an example, we may be aſſured, there would not be wanting others, who would affront death and every danger, rather than ſubmit to theſe tyrannical orders, and involve their ſouls in this fearful criminality: Could the ſacred paſtors of the flock, who had preached ſo often and ſo powerfully Jeſus Chriſt, and him crucified, call that

that Jeſus accurſed? Incenſe a living worm, and worſhip a ſtock or a ſtone? How much preferable were priſons, and death to ſuch an execrable requiſition? Were there not multitudes of the flock who would follow them in the bloody ſacrifice? Almoſt incredible to modern vulgar Chriſtianity, as this may be, we ſee ſuch things have been, and whenever a ſimilar ſtate of the world ſhall bring again the fiery trial, it will be found that the power of the Holy Ghoſt hath not forſaken the earth, but that there are ſtill ſome, many, ready to die for the name of the Lord Jeſus.

7. How perfectly ſimilar are the philoſophical ideas of Chriſtianity in every age? In their view it was a kind of madneſs—a fanatic contagion that had ſpread chiefly among the populace—an overſtrained affectation of religion, and being righteous overmuch—an imbecillity and depravity of the human underſtanding—a worſhip as abſurd in its object as ſuperſtitious in the devotion and the preciſeneſs of its profeſſors. Read Pliny, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, and remark how exactly coincident their views are of Chriſtianity! And I am greatly miſtaken in my knowledge of human nature, if in ſimilar circumſtances the modern infidel would not be as bitter a perſecutor as the antient. With all their notions of candour and humanity, we ſee

in

in Pliny and Trajan, that the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. They muſt hate and deſpiſe the Goſpel and its profeſſors: and whenever power is in the hands of oppreſſors, their pretended philanthropy will not heſitate to ſhed a Chriſtian's blood.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST CENTURY—CLEMENT, AND HIS EPISTLES.

THE teſtimony of the heathen writers will to many convey more unexceptionable evidence than the writings of the primitive Chriſtians. The letters of Pliny and Trajan, and the annals of Tacitus, are univerſally admitted as genuine; nor, I believe, was a doubt ever ſuggeſted to the contrary, whilſt the Epiſtles of Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, have miniſtered much diſpute, their authenticity been queſtioned, and charges laid againſt them of fraud and interpolations. Many pretended genuine antient works have been proved ſpurious, and generally rejected. The apoſtolic canons and conſtitutions of Ignatius, the Epiſtle of Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermes, writings early circulated, carry forgery and falſehood on the face of them, and have been exploded by all learned and impartial judges.

Perhaps alſo, it might be ſuggeſted, that the writings of Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, were

not the beſt ſpecimens of that age, though unfortunately the only ones which have reached us. Many probably of the Chriſtians of that day could have wrote more ably; more clearly reſpecting evangelical truth; and more forcibly in regard to argument. The ſtile, manner, and ſentiments of theſe reſpected fathers, though pious, and plainly expreſſed, diſcover a great inferiority, as authors, to many who followed them in the next ages, and ſtill more to the writers of later times. Indeed, all thoſe called *apoſtolic fathers* appear, (I hope I ſhall not offend by ſpeaking the truth,) low in the ſcale of excellence, whether in preciſion of doctrine, clearneſs of argument, knowledge and comment of Scripture, beauty of ſtile, or forcibleneſs of application, compared with many of a more modern date. The reverence for the fathers hath been of late greatly, perhaps too much, reduced, ſince we have begun more ſcrupulouſly to weigh excellence, not by antiquity, but the moſt exact correſpondence with the Divine oracles. With theſe aſſuredly we have, ſince immediate inſpiration ceaſed, better means of being acquainted, than any of the moſt renowned fathers. Some, perhaps all, the books of the ſacred code, were diſſeminated before the end of the firſt century, but theſe were of more difficult attainment, than we can now ſcarcely conceive. The praiſe the fathers merit, and have well earned, is the ſimplicity which is in Chriſt; zeal

to

to promote what they themſelves believed; and readineſs to ſeal with their blood the teſtimony which they bore. Let it alſo be remembered, that books were then ſo ſcarce; the opportunities of ſcientific knowledge ſo few and reſtricted; the Chriſtians, from their ſtation in life, and the conſtant ſcene of ſufferings with which they had to conflict, ſo unfavourably ſituated, and deprived of the means of improvement, that the wonder is, how the works of the moſt antient fathers are ſuch as we find them. If they gain not the palm of the rhetorician, they bear the nobler ſtamp of unadorned truth. To the honour of theſe holy men let it be recorded, that they did more for their adorable Maſter, than many of their wiſer followers have been willing to attempt, or able to atchieve. They went out *preaching every where*, and God bore witneſs to their labours with ſigns following: ſigns, more noble than the miraculous powers, with which, I apprehend, beyond the firſt century, few were inveſted: ſigns of converſion in ſinners of the moſt deſperate characters, to the knowledge, love, and worſhip of God our Saviour, by the power of the Holy Ghoſt.

The moment we leave the oracles of God, tradition is but a treacherous guide; and when we muſt be content with the report of ſuch authors

as Euſebius, collecting at the diſtance of two hundred years, traditionary information; and under all the prejudices and credulity that are ſo glaringly marked in him, I am cordially thankful for *the more credible teſtimonies of heathen men.*

CLEMENT.

An. 92. The writings of this apoſtolic father, marked with the characters of authenticity, ſerve to caſt ſome light upon the Chriſtian Church. Whether he be the ſame perſon, whoſe name is recorded by the Apoſtle, (Phil. iv. 3.) is uncertain, though not improbable. He had, in that caſe, been the fellow labourer with the Apoſtle, and his attendant at Philippi. Whether he was a native Roman, or left by the Apoſtle at Rome to ſuperintend the concerns of that church, appears not decided. He had probably alſo, if Paul's aſſociate, become well acquainted with the Corinthian church, where wealth and wiſdom had early introduced ſo much corruption, deſire of pre-eminence, a diſputatious and factious ſpirit, and conſequently moſt diſhonourable diviſions; and theſe unhappily continued and increaſed.

The addreſs of his Epiſtle to the Corinthians, remarkably reſembles that of the Apoſtle, whoſe fellow labourer he might have been. But not ſpeaking

ſpeaking with his authority, or in his own name, Clement communicates the reſult of the conſideration of the whole church at Rome, on the caſe they had received, and now anſwered; addreſſing it to the church at Corinth, to *the called* and *ſanctified in Chriſt Jeſus*. Clement arrogates no title, aſſumes no dignity, nor directs himſelf to any individual officer in the Corinthian church; but as the organ of his own congregation, replies to the general Corinthian body, whom it concerned.

He commences with excuſing the delay of an anſwer from the afflicted and perſecuted ſtate of the Roman church. Having in general ſpoken highly of the fidelity and exemplary conduct of the Corinthians, as the elect of God, he eſpecially remarks their zeal for doing good; the fulneſs of the Holy Ghoſt in their hearts; and the ſpirit of prayer upon them for pardon and peace in their own ſouls; and for the accompliſhment of the number of the elect.

From hence he paſſes to the unhappy change which had ſupervened, when many had departed from the good old paths; and ſeduced by a ſpirit of pride and envy, left the ways and ordinances of Chriſt, to walk after their own luſts.

Having produced the bright examples of apoſtles and prophets, whom they ſhould hear and imitate, he warns them againſt thoſe who wanted to lord it over God's heritage; to introduce contention and diviſion; and exhorts them to cleave to thoſe miniſters, whoſe godlineſs and peaceable demeanour were ſo different from the hypocritical profeſſors: aſſuring them, that Chriſt was only theirs, who thought humbly of themſelves; and preſumed not to exalt themſelves over his fold and flock.—That inſtead of gorgeous robes of diſtinction, they ſhould rather imitate the worthies who wandered about in ſheep-ſkins and goat-ſkins. Heb. xi. 37. And inſtead of high imaginations, remember the lowly thoughts of Abraham, (Gen. xviii. 27.) and Moſes, Exod. iii. 11.

He exhorts them to reverence their preſidents προηγουμενοι, to honour the elders, and inſtruct the younger in the fear of God, their wives and their children, agreeable to the faith which is in Chriſt, and the teaching of the Holy Ghoſt. He particularly reminds them of the reſurrection day, to enforce every exhortation; but unhappily chuſes an elucidation from the phœnix, as a reality.

The ſanctity of the Chriſtian character is moſt ſolemnly inſiſted upon; with ſtrong rebukes againſt all

all reviling; impure connections; drunkenneſs, inſolences, covetouſneſs, adulteries, and execrable pride. The true miniſters whom they ought to cleave to and follow, are deſcribed by indubitable marks, as having received the grace of God in truth; being humble, ſelf-denied, far removed from all cenſoriouſneſs; and juſt men effectively, not in their lips, but in their lives; and who preached not themſelves, but Chriſt Jeſus the Lord.*

The doctrines which characterize the true teachers from the falſe, he explicitly deſcribes.—

* Mr. Milner, in his excellent Church Hiſtory, which, like every thing human, hath its imperfections, ſtrongly reprobates (P. 138, vol. i.) the conduct of many in the preſent day, as the counterpart of the Corinthian church, who, under ſpecious repreſentations of the right of private judgment and pleas of conſcience, fall into the heinous guilt of ſchiſm. I am aſtoniſhed, that a man of his Chriſtian knowledge and experience, can ſee any ſimilitude between a multitude of gracious ſouls withdrawing from falſe teachers, and paſtors who walk diſorderly, working not at all, the very characters here deſcribed, and forming real churches under faithful labourers of their own choice, and proud and wicked Corinthians? Do men withdraw from *godly paſtors?* For one of this deſcription in the preſent day, who can be blamed for ſo doing; ten thouſand withdraw from their parochial, or heretical teachers, on the ſoundeſt grounds of Chriſtian obligation. The crime and the ſchiſm is with thoſe who cauſe it by their unſcriptural teaching and conduct, not with thoſe who come out from among them, and are ſeparate.

"We therefore," ſaith he, "called by the will of "God, are not conſtituted juſt men by ourſelves, "neither on account of our attainments in ſcience, "power of intellect, our piety, or works, even "wrought with ſanctity of heart, but BY FAITH, "by which alone, the omnipotent God hath juſ- "tified all who ever were juſt before him, to whom "be glory for ever and ever!" So unequivocal a confeſſion of the true faith is to be ſtrongly noted, as the cardinal hinge of the queſtion, who are the ſchiſmatics; to what teachers we muſt cleave; and from whom we muſt ſeparate the diſciples.

The good works which adorn the Chriſtian doctrine, he proceeds to enforce, and which every faithful man muſt be careful to maintain.

The apoſtles, commiſſioned of Chriſt, appointed biſhops and deacons, of ſuch as were approved by the Spirit, and the whole Church, whoſe choice was always to be conſulted, and without which no miniſter could be impoſed upon them. As theſe, he obſerves, miniſtered with humility and fidelity, and with the higheſt teſtimony of their excellence; one or two inſolent, proud, and over-bearing biſhops, ſhould not be ſuffered to deprive them of their biſhop's office. Happy the preſbyters, he adds, who have finiſhed their courſe, &c. So that in the Corinthian church, preſbyters and biſhops were

were ſtill ſynonimous. But ſome rich, proud, and inſolent men, aſſumed a ſuperiority over their fellows, and wanted to exerciſe dominion, by caſting out of the church the moſt holy and exemplary paſtors, whoſe conduct reproached their pride, their negligence, and worldly-mindedneſs.

It is evident alſo hitherto, that no change had been made in the election of miniſters, and that every preſbyter or biſhop was the choice, or had the approbation of the people, without which, none had dared to intrude himſelf, or impoſe others upon the church.

Exhorting them to peace and charity, to heal their breaches, and ſubmit to their godly preſbyters, and that they may ſend back ſpeedy tidings of their reſtoration to union and love: He concludes with a fervent prayer, that God who elected the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and us by him, for his peculiar people, would crown them with every Chriſtian grace, and prepare them for his eternal glory.

Such is the ſubſtance of this famed epiſtle. I confeſs the internal evidence of its genuineneſs is ſtrong, and no deviation perceivable in doctrine or practice, from the apoſtolic model.

I obſerve

I obſerve throughout no mention of miraculous gifts, and am diſpoſed to think they generally ceaſed with the firſt generation of the Apoſtles' converts and ſucceſſors, and rarely exiſted beyond the firſt century. At leaſt in the extended and aſtoniſhing greatneſs that they were at firſt diſpenſed, by the laying on of the hands of the Apoſtles.

One piece of hiſtory is here recorded reſpecting the martyrdom of Paul and Peter, though the place of their ſufferings is not aſcertained.

On the whole this is a moſt valuable teſtimony for true Chriſtianity, and though the difference in every view with the ſacred epiſtles is ſtriking, yet all the fundamental doctrines and practices are clearly laid down. The godhead and glory of Jeſus Chriſt; the election of God; the redemption by blood; juſtification by faith; a confutation of objectors, ſtrongly ſimilar to the Apoſtle's arguing in the Epiſtle to the Romans, reſpecting its influence on good works; and all the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghoſt recommended, preparatory to the glory which ſhall be revealed.

Tradition mentions the names of Clemens and Domitilla, perſons of great rank and endowments, and of the imperial family, as numbered among the faithful

faithful in the Roman church. But Chriſtianity cannot receive dignity from its profeſſors, though it always confers it. The Romiſh church was ſtill in obſcurity, below the notice of the writers of the age, and ſuffering the odium and contempt of the noble and the philoſopher.

What is called the ſecond epiſtle of Clement is rather to be thought the firſt, as no mention of diviſions is made in it. Indeed the whole contains little particular. The opening ſentence conveys a ſtrong aſſertion of the godhead of our Lord; and the exhortations and charges are truly apoſtolical. It is ſhort, a part being wanting, and the laſt paragraph which is preſerved, probably a ſpurious addition. The whole has been much queſtioned. Nor does it ſeem of any importance, ſince it communicates no freſh light on the ſubject of the Chriſtian Church, nor adds any conſiderable ſtock to Chriſtian knowledge or experience. The whole is unadorned with any beauty of diction, and ſuch only as the ſimpleſt Chriſtian might indite. Thus to the end of the firſt century, the church had formed no alteration in its eſtabliſhed mode of government and order, different from what appears in the Acts of the Apoſtles and the Epiſtles. The churches lived in near communion with each other as one body; received each other's members, as buſineſs or the calls of the Goſpel occaſioned removals, as their own; conſulted each other in matters

matters of difficulty, and reproved each other in caſes of offence. But no perſon or church arrogated dominion over others. The church of Corinth affected no ſuperiority over Rome, nor Rome over Corinth. Wherever the higheſt opinion was entertained of wiſdom, ſanctity, and the indwelling power of the Holy Ghoſt in any church, or her miniſters, there advice would naturally be ſought, and they would be heard with reverence and reſpect as the epiſtle of Clemens teſtifies. But no claims of pre-eminence or prelatical power here make their appearance.

Matters, however, it muſt be owned, reſted not long in this ſtate of lowlineſs and ſimplicity. *Ignatius* will ſoon be ſeen advancing many degrees above Clemens in epiſcopal authority, and Cyprian riſing abundantly higher on the ſtilts of prelatical arrogance. This was an increaſing evil. Before the middle of the ſecond century the change was conſiderable, though for a while the poverty and perſecutions of the Church ſerved as a ſtrong check to the native corrupt affectation of power and ſuperiority in the human heart.

Conſidering the times, and regarding the perſons called to be ſaints, a learned miniſtry cannot be ſuppoſed in the primitive church. The preſbyters muſt have been in general men ſimple and unlettered,

lettered, though full of faith and of the Holy Ghoſt, the qualifications which then determined the ſuffrage of the ſeveral flocks. They were perſons little ſuited to diſpute with the philoſophers on the arcana of nature, or metaphyſical ſubtiltics, but they could tell a plain and affecting ſtory of him who bought us with his own moſt precious blood, who died for us and roſe again; and of the guilt and inevitable ruin of all who ſhould neglect ſo great ſalvation: and the effects produced by their preaching were ſeen to be mighty through God to the pulling down the ſtrong holds of ſin in the human heart, againſt which the heathen ſophiſts and moraliſts had made their attacks in vain. Indeed the very beſt of *them* were themſelves the ſervants of corruption. And after all the fine things, ſo finely wrote about virtue and morals, their own conduct afforded a pregnant example of the impotence of the doctrines which they taught, or rather of the opinions on which they ſceptically harangued: whilſt the Chriſtian biſhops not only lived what they profeſſed to teach, but were every day ready to go to priſon and to death for the name of the Lord Jeſus.

The books of the canon of Scripture are ſuppoſed to have been collected for the uſe of the church before the expiration of the firſt century; and quotations from them and references to them

are

are found in the earlieſt writers. But I apprehend no creed had *apoſtolic* ſanction; though every church had their mode of admitting members on their confeſſion of the faith, which is after godlineſs. How ſoon the creed bearing the name of the Apoſtles generally prevailed is uncertain. I ſhould conceive the whole was neither at once adopted, nor generally, but grew up by degrees, and became univerſal, as a plain and preciſe epitome of Chriſtian faith. The hereſies that began to prevail, ſeem to have contributed to this, as they made an explicit declaration on the points relative to the incarnation of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt more neceſſary, and his glory and godhead were yet the foundations of every real Chriſtian's faith and joy.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

ON HERESIES.

THE Apoſtles' Creed naturally leads to the conſideration of the grand hereſies, which commencing in the times of the Apoſtles, and hardly checked by their preſence and labours, burſt forth with greater violence, when towards the end of this century, theſe apoſtolical men were removed to their eternal reſt. Theſe hereſies were chiefly twofold, proceeding from the natural pride of the human heart, the ſources of which St. Paul had ſo diſtinctly marked. "The Jews require a ſign, and the Greeks ſeek after wiſdom, but we preach Chriſt crucified to the Jews a ſtumbling block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs." As many of both theſe were brought to the confeſſion of the Chriſtian faith, and only partially abandoned their own former prejudices; they early indulged their peculiar ſpeculations.

The DOCETÆ of whom the Cerinthians and Nicolaitans ſeem to be branches, ſuppoſed the human nature of Chriſt to be only an apparent body, and

and not real manhood; and thus the doctrine of atonement by him, and all the conſequences thence flowing, with the reſurrection of the dead, entirely vaniſhed. Theſe, from their nice and curious ſpeculations on the divine nature, and their attempts to explain every thing myſtically and allegorically, received the name of *gnoſtics*. St. Paul deſcribed their pretenſions, then already begun, as *ſcience falſely ſo called*.

The others were called EBIONITES, from their leader Ebion; ſuppoſed by Tertullian, to be a Jewiſh ſect; though I am rather diſpoſed to think they were the offspring of the Judaizing Chriſtians, who had given the church ſo much trouble, and particularly had occaſioned ſo many diviſions at Corinth and Galatia. They admitted Jeſus Chriſt to be a true man, and of a tranſcendently excellent character, but they ſuppoſed morals conſtituted the eſſence of religion; and excluded every idea of the incarnate Deity, as a ſubſtitute for others, and a propitiation for our ſins: ſuppoſing that by *their own virtue* and excellence, they became entitled to the favour of God, and that copying his example, which demonſtrated how far a holy man could arrive towards perfection, they might claim true diſcipleſhip. The ſame pride of knowledge, and vain conceit of human ability continue to produce the ſame effects, and though men now may not adopt

adopt all the whims of Gnoſtics or Ebionites, in the eſſential points of hereſy they exactly copy them. All Arians, Socinians, deiſtical, philoſophical Chriſtians, and all proud and ſelf-righteous phariſaical profeſſors, who think they can commend themſelves to God by their own doings and duties, are the ſeed and deſcendants of the Gnoſtics and Ebionites of the firſt age. As the nature of corrupt man is the ſame, under whatever ſhades hereſy appears, in eſſence and principle it will be always alike, and ſpring from one or other of theſe grand ſources of error, an overweening conceit of our own wiſdom and ſcience, or a high imagination of our native moral powers and ability to walk and to pleaſe God.

CHAP. IV.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE SECOND CENTURY, AND THE MARTYRDOM OF IGNATIUS.

AMIDST the flames of perſecution kindled without, and the corruptions and errors broached within, the Church continued to raiſe her ſacred head encircled with glory, and to enlarge her borders farther and wider. The luminous evidence attending the Goſpel word; the Divine power which attended the preaching; the holy lives of its profeſſors; the zeal of confeſſors, and the blood of martyrs failed not to make daily and numerous converts to the truth: and as Pliny informs us, *Civitates, vicos, agros pervagata eſt.* The great towns firſt evangeliſed were filled with multiplied churches. The villages naturally received the light burſting from them, and all the vicinage formed ſimilar aſſemblages. And as is the nature of Chriſtian zeal, it knew no bounds, but diffuſed the knowledge of Chriſt into the very farm-houſes, where overſeers and ſlaves, who uſually tilled the ground, heard and welcomed the liberty with which Chriſt had made them free.

After

After the departure of the great itinerant evangeliſts to their reſt in glory, and on the increaſing extent of the Chriſtian Church in every place, the deſirableneſs of a ſtationary preſident ſeems to have introduced a change in the government of the ſeveral evangeliſed cities and churches. The very learned Chancellor King endeavours to prove, that in the largeſt cities there was but one church and one biſhop. I have already given my reaſons for differing from him, and for ſuppoſing the neceſſity of many houſe congregations, where the body of Chriſtian profeſſors was ſo great: and as they ſought to avoid obſervation, and attract as little as poſſible the attention of the rulers, they would not aſſuredly in ſuch immenſe multitudes have aſſembled in one place. That about the beginning of the ſecond century, a biſhop appears at the head of a preſbytery, can hardly be doubted, and the name became appropriate to *one*, which before all the preſbyters had equally borne. Being now no longer under the ſuperintending care of the great apoſtolic evangeliſts, who went about every where to eſtabliſh order, to preſerve the unity of the Church, and be the cementing bond of the whole body, the ſeveral churches and preſbyters ſeem to have choſen one of their own body to ſupply the preſidence theſe had before exerciſed. Whether the largeſt cities, however, as King argues, formed only one congregation with many

preſbyters, or, as I rather think, conſiſted of many congregations with preſbyters in each of them, the whole ſeems now to have formed one body, under a ſuperintendant or επισκοπος choſen by themſelves. Every church exerciſed diſcipline over its own members; in which the whole aſſembly of the faithful gave their ſuffrage. The reverence for their paſtors was great, but clerical dominion had as yet found no place.

Such appears to have been the ſtate of the Church in the beginning of the ſecond century.—All the Apoſtles probably, and the men of the firſt generation, who had been the diſciples of the Lord, and come forth from Jeruſalem, had by this time finiſhed their teſtimony; as well as moſt of a ſecond race, who had heard them. The churches had therefore no longer theſe oracles of wiſdom to conſult in their emergencies, but were left to the general teaching of the word and ſpirit, and the directions received before their departure. Tradition affirms, that the Apoſtle John ſurvived the reſt, and lived to the end of the century, or nearly; cloſing his race at Epheſus. But as there is little reaſon to ſuppoſe he was exempted from the general lot of mortality, his feebleneſs and imbecillity would prevent probably the churches from receiving any eſſential advantages from his labours, ſome time before he finally cloſed his mortal career.

career. Though the current of tradition will have all the apoſtles martyrs, for the honour of Chriſtianity, I ſee no reaſon or concluſive authority for ſuppoſing it; and rather think it probable, that delivered from his baniſhment at Patmos, and reſtored to his brethren, he peaceably finiſhed his courſe, and departed like the patriarch, in a good old age and full of days, and was gathered unto his fathers, as well as others of the apoſtles.

A dark cloud of perſecution now lowered over the Chriſtians, juſtly provoked by their diviſions and declenſions from apoſtolic purity, ſimplicity and humility. The ſhort reign of Nerva had caſt a gleam of ſunſhine and peace, after the ſtorms which had gone over them. The toleration with which he had indulged them, ceaſed on the acceſſion of Trajan. He bore an utter enmity againſt Chriſtianity, and ſeems to have apprehended it in a political view, as ready to introduce a ſyſtem contrary to the deſpotiſm which he cheriſhed. And the obſtinacy of the Chriſtians, in refuſing to ſubmit implicitly to all his commands, provoked the hatred of a man, who, aſſuming deity, and demanding worſhip, could not bear to be contradicted and oppoſed by the meaneſt of his ſubjects. He conſidered not the cauſe, the fact was ſufficient in his views to juſtify his ſeverity.

I refer to the letters juſt produced of Pliny and Trajan, for the truth of what is here affirmed, they ſpeak unequivocally. Perſecution could not but rage under ſuch a man, and of ſuch a ſpirit. The firſt diſtinguiſhed character and martyr of this century, whoſe writings are come down to us, was

IGNATIUS.

I mean not to enter into the genuineneſs of his epiſtles, or the interpolations with which they are charged. I am diſpoſed to receive conviction from the arguments of thoſe ingenious men, who have concluded their authenticity; and they carry every internal mark of belonging to that age, and to the perſon to whom they are imputed; and as ſuch are valuable monuments of antiquity. AN. 107 to 116.

The authenticity of the acts of Ignatius is juſtly queſtioned. Some facts, however, may be ſeparated from the fables with which they are mixed. His character appears excellent, and his end glorious; though the means which led to it, if truly recorded, which I doubt, will by no means demand our imitation or approbation. He is ſaid to have been the Biſhop of Antioch, when Trajan viſited that city in his expedition againſt the Parthians, in the year 107. The perſecution againſt the Chriſtians,

as

as appears from the letters above mentioned, had raged with great fury in Aſia, and continued unabated. Ignatius, who had hitherto been ſpared, or protected, (as tradition reports) appeared now too ambitious of martyrdom, and determined to preſent himſelf before Trajan, and to defy the fury of the oppreſſor. The reaſons given for his conduct ſeem indefenſible in the higheſt degree; for, inſtead of averting the ſtorm by offering himſelf to ſuffer, it cannot be ſuppoſed but that this muſt have had the ſtrongeſt tendency to bring down the arm of vengeance upon his flock in general. The conference reported in the acts of Ignatius may be fabulous, and an attempt of ſome officious Chriſtian of a ſubſequent age, to caſt a falſe glory over the martyr, who, if the relation was true, would appear in the eyes of every enlightened mind, blameable for ruſhing on his own deſtruction, without any apparent call of duty.

The enmity of Trajan againſt the Chriſtians, might naturally lead him to enquire in his journey through the provinces, for the moſt eminent of the Chriſtian teachers; and on them chiefly his wrath would deſcend. Probably Ignatius was ſeized by his order; and having made a noble confeſſion of his faith, was ſentenced to be devoured by wild beaſts in the theatre at Rome, to intimidate that

numerous body of Chriſtians whom Trajan had left behind; or to excite, by this inſtance of his own ſeverity, the activity of the magiſtrates to continue the perſecution with vigour, when ſuch an example from the Emperor himſelf ſpoke his pleaſure reſpecting the full execution of his edicts.

Ignatius may, indeed, have acted imprudently, or replied improperly. It is not neceſſary to vindicate every act or word of the beſt of men. His letter to the Romans is very exceptionable, but it is ſufficiently evident that his Chriſtian courage was proof againſt the fears of death, in its moſt tremendous forms; and, that nothing had a ſtronger tendency to confirm the faith of his church, than that he was willing not only to be bound, but as Paul, to die for the name of the Lord Jeſus. The zeal, which even errs, is reſpectable, and infinitely preferable to the worldly wiſdom, and timid prudence, that contrives every mean device to ſhrink from the Croſs. We ſhould neither court it in ſelf-ſufficiency, nor ſhun it in the way of duty.

He was ſent guarded to Seleucia, then to Smyrna, there he is ſaid to have been viſited by Polycarp. Thither deputies from ſeveral Aſiatic congregations came to comfort and converſe with him. And during his ſtay there, four of the ſeven letters ſuppoſed

poſed to be genuine, are written. They are far from elegant compoſitions, neither marked with purity of diction nor ſtrength of reaſoning: and ſometimes tumid and affectedly rhetorical.

In doctrine he ſeems not to have degenerated from the truth as it is in Jeſus. The ſuperſcription of the epiſtle to the church of Epheſus marks ſtrongly, the doctrines of grace. He ſpeaks humbly of himſelf, and very highly of Oneſimus, and of the church brightened in the furnace of affliction. Whether this be the perſon mentioned by Paul, who had been ſlave to Philemon is uncertain. He eſpecially commends union and peace, and repeatedly enforces obedience to their biſhop, and carefully to avoid every occaſion of diviſion in the Church.

A preſbytery with a biſhop at their head is now firſt diſtinctly marked; and obedience to them enjoined as to Chriſt in a pretty high ſtrain of authority; and ſubjection to the biſhop repeatedly inculcated, as to God himſelf.

In this epiſtle I find the firſt mention of the Virgin Mary, but in no wiſe leading to ſuperſtitious reverence for her. Throughout the whole, union with Chriſt, as the living head, is taught as the eſſence of genuine Chriſtianity, and his own aſſumed

aſſumed name of *Theophorus*,* is indicative of his perſonal experience on this behalf.

He exhorts them to unite conſtantly for the exerciſe of divine worſhip; marks with the ſtrongeſt language the deity of Jeſus Chriſt—his divine and human nature—aſcribes to him the knowledge of the ſecrets of all hearts—he himſelf being our indwelling God, and we his conſecrated temples.—In all good fruits, therefore, we muſt give proof of the living tree; and all corruption of the fleſh muſt be avoided—knowing the fearful puniſhment awaiting every defilement with women, even eternal torment, and fire which never will be quenched.

The real divinity of Jeſus Chriſt; his incarnation, as God and man in one Chriſt; faith in and union with him, as the true life of Chriſtianity; purity of character; the eternal puniſhment of ſin, are clearly and preciſely marked as the doctrines of the true Church.

It muſt be acknowledged that there are ſome expreſſions, (if theſe are not the interpolations of after-times) amidſt all the profeſſions of humility, too ſelf-exalting: an epiſcopal elevation which begins to peep out: and a foundation laying for more arrogant claims. The biſhop at the head of a

* Theophorus, bearing God.

preſbytery,

preſbytery, probably numerous, feels himſelf too important, and ſeems peculiarly jealous to impreſs a ſenſe of this dignity of office on the Epheſians. His impatience to be the food of beaſts, and his eagerneſs to prevent the leaſt efforts for his deliverance, and deprive him of the honour of martyrdom, to which he aſpired, may have had motives to juſtify his deſire to himſelf, though they do not to us.

The epiſtle to the Magnenſians, if not ſpurious or interpolated, is full of the ſame epiſcopal exhortations, and ſtill ſomething heightened. "Be "ſubject to the Biſhop, as Jeſus Chriſt to the "Father, and the Apoſtles to Chriſt, and the "Father, and the Holy Ghoſt." Though a ſoftening ſalvo is added, and "to one another alſo." The title given in the addreſs to the biſhop, To THE MOST DIGNIFIED, ſavours not of apoſtolical humility.

The warnings againſt a judaical and phariſaical ſpirit ſhow how that inveterate evil ſtuck in the Church; and that the Jewiſh ſabbath had not yet wholly given place to the Lord's day. Repeated mention of the Father, Son, and Spirit, as the doctrine of the Lord and his Apoſtles, leaves no doubt of the faith of the Trinity in Unity, as uncorrupted,

corrupted, in the Magnenſian church. The Magnenſians with the Trallians, were new churches, here firſt noticed in the records of antiquity.

In his epiſtle to the Trallians, whoſe biſhop was Polybius, who had viſited him at Smyrna, he appears careful to exalt the clerical character. "Reverence," ſaith he, "the biſhop as the repreſentative of God the Father, and the preſbyters, "as God's ſanhedrim." And again, "He that is "within the altar is clean, but he that is without, "that is who doth any thing without the biſhop, "preſbytery and deacons, he is not pure in conſcience." Againſt the errors of the Docetæ, or the deniers of the reality of Chriſt's ſufferings in the fleſh, and of his reſurrection, he is particularly ſtrong and explicit. Many bleſſed truths are occaſionally interſperſed, but the principal object ſeems to be, the inculcating obedience to the clergy.

In the epiſtle to the Romans, paſſing over his rhetorical figures of deſire to be devoured by the beaſts, which mark a haſte for martyrdom and a deſcription of it too florid, there are a few noble ſentiments. "Nothing ſeen is eternal, momen-"tary are the objects of ſenſe, but the things un-"ſeen are forever." "For as much as Jeſus Chriſt "exiſts in the Father, he appears the more glorious." "Chriſtianity though it is hated by the world, is not

" not to be concealed in ſilence, but to be mani-
" feſted in all its greatneſs."

The letter to the Philippians is nearly in the ſame ſtrain as the preceding, as is that to the Smyrneans, where the ſame epiſcopal obedience is again and again inculcated. " Without the biſhop " neither baptiſm ſhould be adminiſtered, nor a " love-feaſt kept."

The letter to Polycarp will deſerve the moſt attentive conſideration of all who reverence Ignatius, and epiſcopacy. Such conduct as he recommends will render the office venerable. Such diligence, activity in Chriſt's work, and devotedneſs, deſerve all affection and ſubmiſſion. If ſuch biſhops appeared, diviſions would ſeldom be known, nor could their deſerved eminence of excellence be too highly eſteemed. " To watch with a ſpirit ever attentive— " to ſpeak to each member of the church ſeparate- " ly—to ſeek out all by name—even the ſlaves of " either ſex—and to adviſe every one of the flock " in the article of marriage"—demands a very contracted dioceſe, or an activity of labour inconceivably great.

From the whole of theſe epiſtles, I remark,

1. A forwardneſs to invite martyrdom, that was of ill example: and is no where countenanced in the ſacred writings.

2. Epiſcopal pretenſions, ſuch as had never before appeared. Clement's epiſtle ſuggeſts not a tittle like it.

3. The laborious office of a prelate on whom ſo much devolved, and from whom ſo much was expected.

4. That though a biſhop, preſbyters and deacons, ſeem to have been the eſtabliſhed form of the Aſiatic churches, yet theſe were ſtill the election of the people.

5. That criminal as it is to withdraw from a zealous, faithful and laborious paſtor, as abſurd would it be to expect the faithful to receive and ſubmit to one whoſe conduct is the very reverſe. When the biſhop cauſes the people to leave him, for his negligence, worldlineſs, pride, and ignorance, both of his duty and of his flock, he is the ſchiſmatic, not who withdraws, but he who makes ſuch a ſeparation neceſſary.

6. Amidſt evident infirmity in the faithful—ſchiſmatical diviſions, and great apoſtacy in the day of

of temptation—there evidently appears a bleſſed generation of redeemed ſinners ready to ſuffer and to ſerve the Lord Jeſus Chriſt; holding faſt the faithful word, and ſtanding in the blood of atonement, and by the power of the Holy Ghoſt; adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, and living witneſſes for the power and purity of the everlaſting Goſpel. No abſolutely perfect men or churches are to be looked for: but ſuch as were truly faithful, and called, and choſen, abounded in the days of Ignatius.

7. There was a glorious ſpread of the Goſpel of Chriſt amidſt the fire of perſecution without, and the offences and apoſtacy within. The inſufficiency of the inſtruments employed, to all human view, conſidering their helpleſſneſs, want of literature, and degradation in every thing which gives eminence, reſpect and authority in the ſight of men, offers an irrefragable evidence of the divine power which enabled the weak things of this world to confound the mighty; and the fooliſh things of this world to confute the wiſe; and to make the ſimplicity of Goſpel truth, and the deſpiſed doctrine of the Croſs triumphant over the malice, might, and reaſonings of all its enemies.

8. Whatever hereſies had attempted to lift up their heads, their progreſs hitherto had not been great.

great. The Church as a body had generally continued a ſpiritual Church, walking in the light of truth, and under the influence of the Holy Ghoſt. Philoſophy had ſcarcely yet begun to introduce its debaſing mixtures: nor had the teachers preſumed to be affectedly wiſe above what is written. No inſolence of public excommunication by any epiſcopal authority had yet appeared; much leſs had the foreign biſhop of another church dared to thunder out his anathemas. Chriſtians were too much taken up with the weightier matters of ſalvation to quarrel and excommunicate each other about the day on which Eaſter ſhould be kept; or the nicety of definitions, reſpecting matters, of which words are incapable of conveying diſtinct ideas, becauſe they relate to the incomprehenſible God, and his mode of ſubſiſtence: theſe had not yet been introduced. The flood-gates of evil were however now opening, and ready to deluge the Chriſtian Church. Error and perſecution were about to drive the woman with the man child into the wilderneſs, where though exiſting, they were to be hid for a time, and times, and half a time.

Conveyed to Rome after a tedious navigation, Ignatius was impatient to cloſe the ſcene; and devoured by wild beaſts in the theatre, afforded a ſpectacle to that inhuman people.

POLYCARP,

POLYCARP, OF EPHESUS.

An. 160. Polycarp, the friend and diſciple of Ignatius, followed his example; and under a ſucceeding reign finiſhed his faithful teſtimony by the ſacrifice of himſelf on the altar of truth. I am induced to antedate his hiſtory, and to introduce him in this place, on account of his letter to the Philippians, which breathes nearly the ſame Spirit as thoſe of the preceding martyr, and approaches neareſt to the primitive ſimplicity. He adopts exactly the apoſtolic ſalutation, maintains the fundamental doctrines of the death and reſurrection of Chriſt, and the benefits thence accruing to believers. He exhorts to the practice of all Chriſtian graces—urges the neceſſity of deadneſs to this world, and the mortification of all inordinate deſires.—He deſcribes the duties of preſbyters to their flocks very forcibly, and the obedience reciprocally due to them for their labours of love.—Throughout the letter he appears the real plain Chriſtian paſtor, without affectation of human ſcience, or the appearance of pride or ſuperiority; every where found in the faith, and devoted to the work, ready to die for the Lord Jeſus. As he properly belongs to the times of moſt uncorrupted ſimplicity, I have placed him with Clement and Ignatius. All their epiſtles hitherto ſpeak a lan-

guage ſimple and plain, deſtitute of all philoſophic novelties, or affectation of the wiſdom of this world. The Scriptures are every where quoted by them in their literal and genuine ſenſe, not diſtorted into abſurd and unnatural allegories. The life of faith in the Son of God, is the great point and object moſt inſiſted upon. Subtleties of diſpute, and niceties of definition, are never introduced. Their mode of writing appears deſigned to inform the mind, by inculcating the revealed truths of God, and to recommend their influence on the conſcience and the conduct. No *ſecret doctrine*, as has been ſuggeſted, was reſerved for the initiated in the myſteries of Chriſtianity; like the Apoſtle, they ſhunned not to declare freely, fully, univerſally, the whole counſel of God. Thoſe who made confeſſion of the faith openly, and adorned it by a converſation becoming godlineſs, were admitted to the ſacramental pledges, and joined to the Lord and his Church in viſible communion. And thoſe who diſgraced their Chriſtian profeſſion by unbecoming conduct, or cowardice in the hour of trial, were cut off from the ſociety of the faithful, by the univerſal ſuffrage of the church to which they had belonged, declared by the biſhop or preſbyter; nor could be reſtored but by the ſame authority, after giving the moſt unequivocal proof of their repentance. A relapſe was irremiſſible for ever.

Though

Though the gnoſtic hereſy had begun its progreſs, and even before the death of John, there were many antichriſts; yet the curious philoſophic diſquiſitions of platoniſm, had not yet been engrafted on Chriſtianity, nor many, wiſe under the ſophiſt's cloak, begun to make the religion of Jeſus more palatable, and conformed to the admitted principles and practices of all religions. The Church was yet a garden incloſed, though here and there weeds had grown up, inſtead of flowers and fruit. Perſonal diſputes about pre-eminence, and the deſire to draw away diſciples after them, appear the firſt of evils lamented and oppoſed by theſe good men, whoſe writings we have reviewed. Human nature is the ſame in all ages. The grand matter of controverſy, as yet, related to the method of acceptance with God in the one atonement of Jeſus, in oppoſition to the legal injunctions, ſtill inſiſted upon by judaizing, and ſelf-righteous teachers, in order to juſtification of life. This controverſy never can ceaſe, it will continue to the end of time, being in the nature of man; and tho' the abolition of the ceremonial law be now admitted, the doctrine of grace, as contraſted with works for acceptance with God, muſt be controverted, as long as the unawakened conſcience fancies itſelf poſſeſſed of moral powers to walk and to pleaſe God, and reaſon a ſufficient guide for the diſcovery of all ſaving truth.

Hitherto not a man eminent for ſcience or letters had appeared in the church. All thoſe whoſe works have come down to us, bear a ſtamp of ſimplicity, diveſted of human attainments. Yet by theſe, the Goſpel had been ſupported in its purity; afforded a noble army of martyrs; and been ſpread to the ends of the earth, from the pillars of Hercules to the Parthians, from the ſavage nations of the North to the Indies and Abyſſinia.

It has been diſputed whether human wiſdom and philoſophy have done moſt harm or good to the Church of God. There ſeems to be one plain criterion to judge. Our weapons are not carnal but ſpiritual, and only mighty through God to the pulling down the ſtrong holds of ſin. A plain unlettered man, powerful in the Scriptures, and taught of God is, no doubt, at this day as capable of the miniſtry of the Goſpel, and able to wield the ſword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, as ever. Not indeed in a long ſtring of rhetorical arguments, and with mathematical preciſion, but in cloſe application of the truth as it is in Jeſus, to the conſciences of men. And when modern biſhops deſpiſe ſuch for their lack of ſcience, they little reſemble the beſt of their primitive predeceſſors. The preſent opportunities of learning are ſo much facilitated as to have added greatly to the ſcientific attainments of all ranks of men. And leiſure for

ſtudy

ſtudy and ſuperior advantages, naturally increaſe the ſum of knowledge of every kind, in a larger number of individuals than formerly. But if any man ſuppoſes himſelf caſed in this armour, a giant, and capable of beating down the battlements of error and infidelity, he will find himſelf woefully diſappointed; and that the lines of approach, and the defences will be nearly equal. I am fully ſure that all the fineſt apologies for Chriſtianity, and the polemics of the moſt irrefragable doctors, who truſted to the force of moral ſuaſion, never made *one real Chriſtian.* Knowledge conſidered in itſelf is highly deſirable. The improvement of the human mind delightful and uſeful. And when the nobleſt attainments are laid at the foot of the croſs, and like Paul we ſtill determine to know nothing elſe but Jeſus Chriſt and him crucified, then, and only then, is it worth contending, whether human attainments were ever uſeful for the propagating genuine Chriſtianity.

A learned and ingenious age prides itſelf in its ſuperiority, in defences of revealed religion, and apologies for the Bible. And what is produced by a Conybeare, a Warburton, or a Watſon, will be read with admiration and applauſe by ſcientific men, and thoſe who are initiated in all the learned lore. But what hath this arguing proved? The plain ſtory of a poor unlettered man telling of the

preſbyter, the preſiding miniſter, leading the devotions, to which the people replied with a loud and audible, Amen. The whole was a ſpiritual, not a formal ſervice. They prayed with the ſpirit, and prayed with the underſtanding alſo; they ſung with the ſpirit, and ſung with the underſtanding alſo. He that led the worſhip prayed from his heart and out of its abundance. We have yet no trace of any form or eſtabliſhed ritual. The mode of worſhip was left to the diſcretion of the ſeveral churches and its miniſter. I have no doubt the Lord's Prayer always made a part of their public ſervices.

The ſupper of the Lord cloſed the devotions of his day. I think it was as conſtant as the return of that day; and every member of the church as conſtantly a participant. A friendly meal, or feaſt, called *agapæ*, from the love and union in which they kept it, ſerved at once as an opportunity of miniſtring an act of charity to the poor; and of teſtifying their unity in one body; where all diſtinctions of poor or rich were laid aſide; and no man took before other his own ſupper; but all with humble equality acknowledged themſelves members of the living head, Chriſt, and of one another. I think the kiſs of peace was there given, as they ſat at table.

Then

Then alſo, I apprehend, every man produced, according to his ability, weekly, what he had laid by for charitable purpoſes, which formed a fund of *oblations* under the controul of the church, through the adminiſtration of the biſhop, preſbyters and deacons, for all the various purpoſes of general good; ſuch as, purchaſing the elements for the Lord's Supper; the proviſion of the table for the agapæ; for the neceſſities of the poor; the ſupport of evangeliſts; the relief of the perſecuted; and for the aſſiſtance of ſuch churches, and perſons, whoſe indigence called for the help of their richer brethren. As yet I can perceive no part of this fund appropriated to pay the ſalaries of any miniſter of the ſanctuary, unleſs as he came under the title of an itinerant evangeliſt; and being incapable of providing his own maintenance, and wholly occupied in the Goſpel work, was juſtly entitled, as preaching the Goſpel, to live by the Goſpel. I very much doubt if the biſhop or preſbyters, and deacons, received at firſt any thing for their labours of love. I am perſuaded they thought their work their beſt wages.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

ON MIRACULOUS POWERS.

THE gift of tongues, ſo needful for the firſt promoting the Goſpel, appears to have now generally ceaſed, the great end for which they were given having been anſwered. And I read, with much ſuſpicion, in the next century, of Gregory Thaumaturgus, and the wonders of his fellows. Pious frauds early debaſed the Church; and the principles and the practices of the men, who are the recorders of theſe miracles, render the report very apochryphal. That ſuch were performed during the lives of the immediate ſucceſſors of the Apoſtles, may be admitted; but I am free to confeſs, beyond that period, I doubt: nor do I ſuppoſe Chriſtianity ever depended upon miracles, or permanently required this ſupport. Miracles never converted a ſinner to Chriſt, though they may have called his attention to the Goſpel teſtimony. The truth is independent of them: I find no miracles in Clement, Ignatius, or Polycarp. When Quadratus addreſſed his firſt apology to AN. 117. Adrian, who ſucceeded Trajan, he appeals

peals only for the evidence of miracles, to thoſe of our Saviour; and mentions perſons who were ſtill alive, on whom they had been performed. But he vouches none of a very recent date, which would have been more to the point of his argument, if produceable. I confeſs my opinion here is different from the current of what is called antiquity; but when I conſider the miracles themſelves, at leaſt many of them—the credulity of the reporters—the miſtaken zeal for the honour of Chriſtianity—the witneſſes who come forward—and the channel through which the tradition flows—the more I weigh all theſe circumſtances, the fewer miracles I am induced to credit. I will not affirm, that the whole is fictitious; but I may confidently ſay, much is falſe upon the face of it, and in that caſe alone, the reſt is rendered highly ſuſpicious. Even good men were often weak men, and their credulity more to be pitied than ſeverely cenſured. With all their miſtakes, they were living monuments of Divine grace, and gave a dying teſtimony of faith unfeigned. At leaſt, of the multitude of miracles reported, we may ſay, they were an appeal to evidence not neceſſary. *Teſtibus dubiis in re non neceſſaria.* But I return to the current of hiſtory.

SECT.

SECT. III.

CENT. II. TO THE END.

HAVING carried on the Hiſtory of the Church to the end of the reign of Trajan, and added the death of Polycarp to cloſe the writings of the firſt apoſtolic fathers, we ſhall haſten to the end of the century, and proceed to the eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity by law under Conſtantine: compelled as we advance to deplore the prevailing corruptions; to behold the fair features of truth deformed with the daubings of philoſophy, and the venerable matron diſguiſed with a load of drapery that ſcarce left a trace of primitive ſimplicity; a kingdom not of this world, transformed into an earthly ſanctuary, and the power of godlineſs almoſt loſt under accumulated forms, and rites of human inſtitution.

To the end of the preſent century, five objects will compriſe our enquiries.

1. The ſufferings of Chriſtians under their perſecutors without.
2. Hereſies within.
3. Principal perſonages.
4. Government, rites and ceremonies.
5. Spiritual Church, where preſerved, and how to be traced.

CHAP.

CHAP. I.

SUFFERINGS OF CHRISTIANS UNDER THEIR PERSECUTORS.

WE have conſidered the edicts of the humane and benevolent Trajan, and their execution by the philoſophic Pliny: and nothing can afford a more ſtriking proof of the ſufferings of the Church, than that the very beſt of the emperors manifeſt as bitter an averſion to Chriſtianity as the moſt brutal; and had their hands as deeply imbrued in the blood of martyrs. During the reign of Trajan, a period of about twenty years, how dreadful their caſe muſt have been, we may collect from the ſpecimen, which authentic hiſtory has preſerved. It appears that his edicts were unrepealed, and continued in full force. Wherever the activity of magiſtrates, or the malignity of accuſers brought forth their charges, real or ſuppoſed, the innocent ſuffered. Being the object of general odium, it can hardly be doubted from what we ſee in preſent times, but that every accuſation againſt *them* was credited, however abſurd or contradictory.

tradictory. It was much more eaſy to condemn than examine. When Chriſtians from their renunciation of all falſe deities were termed Atheiſts, from their nightly and ſecret aſſemblies ſuppoſed to perform myſteries, that were in their nature the moſt horrid—and under the covert of darkneſs to commit the greateſt impurities—to be the implacable enemies of mankind, conſigning all others who did not embrace their faith to eternal torments, the moſt unſociable of beings, who refuſed to join in all the common and highly coveted amuſements of the theatre, or private entertainments—Secret rebels againſt government, becauſe they generally avoided the army and magiſtracy, as unable to take the oaths, or to adore the reigning monarch—theſe and a multitude of other cauſes which could be ſuggeſted, and were ſuppoſed, as Pliny obſerves, inſeparably connected with Chriſtianity, rendered them ten thouſand times more obnoxious than men of any other religion, which however diverſe from that eſtabliſhed by law, might obtain toleration. But this militated in all its points againſt emperors, prieſts, philoſophers, and every thing hitherto held ſacred or reſpectable: and, with an intrepidity and zeal, which no torments could ſuppreſs, called by their perſecutors obſtinacy, theſe men would at all events, braving every danger, propagate their opinions, and not keep their religion to themſelves.

From

From theſe adopted premiſes nothing was eaſier than to convict every Chriſtian, in the judgment of his heathen enemies, of the moſt complicated crimes. And wherever an accuſer was found, I ſee not how the law could be prevented from taking its courſe againſt them. The innocence of their lives was no protection. Not only was this not credited; but their own confeſſions of Chriſtianity, and obſtinate reſiſtance to every idolatrous rite, left them without a plea, in the face of the edicts, that muſt judge them. No doubt the humanity of ſome governors, and probably the avarice of others, bribed by the richer Chriſtians to keep the penal laws out of ſight, procured in many places a ſort of quiet impunity. And often the contentions between the men in power, for the ſucceſſion to empire, engaged them in matters more intereſting to themſelves; and diverted their attention from this hated and ſpreading ſect. Yet with every poſſible abatement, under ſuch edicts and ſuch men, the ſufferings of the Church muſt have been deplorable; and nothing but its divine original and ſupport from the great head, could have ſuſtained it in the fires, and ſpread its conqueſts over the obdurate and prejudiced hearts of men.

An. 117. The edicts of Trajan, and preceding emperors, againſt the Chriſtians, continued unrepealed under *Adrian*. And we have no reaſon to ſuppoſe

ſuppoſe that the enmity of their perſecutors much relaxed. The apologies of Quadratus and Ariſtides to this emperor, manifeſt the dreadful ſtate of ſufferings under which the Chriſtians then laboured. But probably a repreſentation from one of his own pro-conſuls in Aſia, Seranius Geranius, engaged him to pay more attention to the ſubject. Emperors and hiſtorians were too great to take much notice of the deſpiſed Chriſtians or their concerns. The reſcript of Adrian to Minucius Fundanus, the next pro-conſul, enjoins a mitigation of their ſtate. Idle clamours muſt not be heard, but if *any thing contrary to the laws* was proved, they muſt take their courſe: and every Chriſtian was obliged to do many things, or abſtain from them, which the law without any prejudiced diſtortion could eaſily lay hold upon.

A freſh ſource of perſecution alſo opened. Always hated by the Jews and perſecuted wherever they prevailed, a reſpite from their malice had been enjoyed ſince the fearful vengeance executed on Jeruſalem and that nation, by Titus. But their prejudices reſpecting the Meſſiah; the unconquerable hope of a temporal deliverer; and their numbers, though ſo thinned by ſlaughter and diſperſed, engaged them once more to rally under the ſtandard of Barchochebas, and contend with the Romans for empire. During the courſe of this

this rebellion, the Chriſtians refuſing to join the ſtandard of this falſe Meſſiah, ſuffered the moſt atrocious indignities, and were maſſacred without mercy, till the rebel's fall, and the deſtruction of his adherents once more covered them from his rage. It was then that an utter excluſion from the city of their ſolemnities, put a final period to the Jewiſh polity. The very name of Jeruſalem was changed to Elia. *A little church with a few houſes only*, occupied by Chriſtians, preſerved the remains of that once vaſt ſociety. A pompous liſt of Jeruſalem biſhops, in Euſebius, marking the ſucceſſion true or fabulous, is of little import. AN. 132.

Whether the reſcript of Adrian produced any change in the Chriſtian's favour is dubious. Certain it is, that the rage of perſecutors had broken out afreſh; and drew from Juſtin Martyr a noble appeal and apology to the emperor Antoninus Pius, refuting the abominable charges laid againſt the Chriſtians, and vindicating the excellence and exemplarineſs of their conduct. AN. 138.

The calamities which befel ſome of the Aſiatic cities, being laid by the pagan prieſts to the door of the Chriſtian atheiſts, they were ſacrificed cruelly as victims to the ſuppoſed anger of the offended deities. But the Emperor, on a repreſentation from them, iſſued a freſh decree, which ſpeaks

highly in the Chriſtians' favour, and could not but tend to ſuſpend the arm of the magiſtrates; forbidding Chriſtians, merely as ſuch, to be moleſted; ſo interpreting the reſcript of Adrian; and making them only in common with other ſubjects, liable to the penalty of the law, for crimes againſt the government. Mr. Gibbon ſuppoſes this decree ſpurious. It is hardly worth diſputing. Favoured or oppreſſed by emperors, there will be always enough in all that will live godly in Chriſt Jeſus to bring down perſecution upon them. Suppoſing this edict genuine, and there ſeems no ſufficient reaſon to impeach it, a noble teſtimony is again therein born to the Chriſtian character. And the imperial ſceptic, who entertains doubts about his own gods, ſeems as an humane infidel, content to leave others the ſame liberty of conſcience, which he himſelf exerciſed.

An. 161. His ſucceſſor Marcus Aurelius, ſo highly celebrated for wiſdom and virtue, and priding himſelf on his philoſophic attainments, with ſtoical unfeelingneſs, as well as ſelf-ſufficiency, ſoon diſcovered his bitter enmity againſt Chriſtianity and its profeſſors. He credulouſly received all the atrocious charges of the pagan prieſts, and infidel ſophiſts, and deaf to the remonſtrances and apologies of Juſtin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tatian and Melito, let looſe his ſavage magiſtrates on theſe inoffenſive

offenſive ſubjects, who died under the imputation of crimes which they abhorred, and became the victims of popular fury and a bigotted philoſopher. Never had the Chriſtians more unjuſt and cruel treatment. Polycarp, Juſtin Martyr, and others, fell before the implacable enmity of the ſtoic; and whole churches were nearly extirpated by the malice and cruelty of his pro-conſuls. There is an hatred and inveteracy in ſelf-righteous all-ſufficiency againſt the real Chriſtian, never felt by the moſt profligate or ſavage. The blaze of rage in a Nero is as the flaſh of lightning, the rooted enmity of an Aurelius, is like the inextinguiſhable fire in the bowels of the volcano. None but a Chriſtian knows how to appreciate the real characters of men. The heart throbs at recounting the tragedies performed in cold blood on the helpleſs, and turns away with diſguſt from the philoſophic perſecutor and his aſſaſſins.

An. 180. *Commodus*, in character, appears the very reverſe of Aurelius, an epicure and abandoned to every vice. Marcia, a woman of mean original, was a beloved concubine of the Emperor: and having great influence over him, employed it in favour of the Chriſtians, whom ſhe either pitied or eſteemed. There is ſomething in real Chriſtian virtue venerable in the eyes even of a profligate, though abhorred by the proud philoſopher or

phariſee: and God can make the baſeſt of perſons ſubſervient to the purpoſes of his own glory, and the good of his Church. The wretch Henry the VIIIth, no more meant the reformation, than Commodus the protection of Chriſtianity. Eventually their lawleſs paſſions produced theſe bleſſed effects.

The reign of Commodus will bring us nearly to the beginning of the third century, and as the Church now enjoyed a meaſure of peace, I ſhall interrupt the ſucceſſion of Roman Emperors, and bring forward each of the other particulars, up to the preſent period.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

THE HERESIES OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

THE ſimplicity of Scripture truth had been the firſt object of the preceding confeſſors. Illiterate men, not coming from any of the ſchools of philoſophy, they adhered to the doctrine of the Croſs, and its atonement, and entered not into niceties of diſquiſition on the nature and attributes of God or the human ſoul. They ſpoke to the conſcience, what they had learned of Chriſt, and experienced in their own hearts. In this period however, matters unhappily took a different turn, and men affecting to be wiſe above what is written, began to introduce a philoſophical Chriſtianity, pregnant with all the hereſies, that have ſince infeſted the Chriſtian world. Preſuming to explain every thing, and reconcile incomprehenſible truth to human capacities; loſt in the labyrinths of vain reaſoning, they involved themſelves in errors, endleſs and abſurd, as the ſource from whence they drew.

Trajan, from the commencement of his reign, had endeavoured to revive the decaying intereſts of

literature, but the Auguſtan age returned no more. Rhetoricians, ſophiſts and grammarians opened ſchools in the various cities of the empire, but the genius of Tully and Hortenſius, had degenerated into declamation, and the purity of the Roman eloquence into puerilities of rhetorical figures. The philoſophers of the different ſects ſtill held their ground; but the *Eclectics*, with Ammonius at their head, taking Plato for their teacher, and engrafting on him all that was applicable from the other ſects, prevailed; eſpecially in the ſchool of Alexandria, and ſpread from thence univerſally. It would be taking too wide a range to enter into all the depths of the Ammonian philoſophy. The attempt, to reconcile all ſects of philoſophers—to amalgamate the heathen mythology, with the Jewiſh and Chriſtian religion—to form one body from theſe heterogeneous materials—preſents a chaos, out of which ſprang all the monſters of errors, which preyed on the riſing generation. All was dreſſed up in myſtery and allegory; and the wideſt ſcope given to the wildeſt flights of imagination.

Chriſtianity, which hitherto had little to boaſt of its converts among the learned and philoſophic, began now to receive a ſpurious adoption, by theſe new diſciples of Plato; but ſuffered grievouſly from the unnatural alliance. Inſtead of the ſimplicity of truth, it became wrapped up in myſtical and allegorical

allegorical interpretations of Scripture, by which the vital ſpirit evaporated, and loſt all its genuine force. From this ſchool came forth men famous in their day, Juſtin, Origen, Tertullian, Pantænus, and many others, zealous indeed in apologies for the Chriſtian cauſe, and ready to die rather than renounce their profeſſion, yet holding a Chriſtianity of ſo equivocal a nature, as to render it very dubious, whether they had any real part or lot in the matter. From their writings originated the doctrines of Pelagius, Arius, and all the train of exalters of human ability, and debaſers of the glory and atonement of God our Saviour. They retained the profeſſion, title and garb of philoſophy, and meant to add thereby a dignity to the Chriſtian religion, which they eſpouſed. Candour was their declared temper, truth their purſuit, and readineſs to ſubmit to the dictates of right reaſon their boaſt. From theſe ſprang the two grand ſources of Chriſtian declenſion.

1. *Error in Doctrine.* Inſtead of keeping to the Scripture language, and being content to be ignorant of what faith adores, and reaſon cannot ſcan, their attempts to pry into the things which are not ſeen, and to define ſpiritual objects more preciſely, opened a door of endleſs controverſy, about the nature of God, and the mode of his Divine ſubſiſtence, concerning the perſon and glory of

Jeſus Chriſt—reſpecting the ſouls of men—and a future ſtate. As their views of God, the Son, and Spirit, were more or leſs degrading, a departure followed from all the eſſentials of Chriſtianity, the vicarious atonement of the great High-prieſt of our profeſſion, Jeſus Chriſt, and the influences of the Holy Ghoſt on the human heart.

2. *Error in Practice.* Under an affectation of greater ſpirituality, as leading to abſorption in God from all created good, and thus exalting the ſoul to ſublimer purity and human perfection, they placed the great objects of religion in contemplation, retirement from the world, and bodily mortification. Hence ſprung in the ſucceeding ages the whole brood of myſtics, monks, hermits, and recluſes. The principles of platoniſm produced their aſcetic rules, and ſecluſion from human ſociety, with all the evils inſeparable from a ſtate ſo unnatural, and contrary to every thing contained in the Scriptures of truth.

I rather mention theſe hereſies in their ſource, than in their ramifications; ſo numerous as to exceed all the bounds, which this ſhort abridgment of Chriſtian hiſtory will permit. Their very names would fill pages. Some of the leading features will appear, when we conſider the principal perſonages who have ſtood moſt prominent

in

in the Chriſtian Church ſo called. The true Church cometh with leſs obſervation, and is to be traced in its nobleſt form and purity among the poor of the flock, and thoſe ſimple evangelical teachers, who, uninfected with the noſtrums of philoſophy, continued to preach and teach Jeſus Chriſt, and aſſuming no ſuperiority over their fellows, or diſtinctions in life, diffuſed their fragrance, like the flowers of the deſert, unnoticed, and unknown.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

OF THE EMINENT PERSONAGES AND WRITERS TO THE END OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

JUSTIN, SURNAMED THE MARTYR. (163).

THIS father of the Church ſtands firſt on the ranks of the Alexandrian ſchool; and among the wiſe men of this world, who began to combat paganiſm with the weapons rather of earthly, than of heavenly temper. The account he gives of himſelf is, that he was a native of Neapolis in Samaria, had a learned education, and went to the famed ſchool of Alexandria for improvement. There his inquiſitive mind, engaged in philoſophical purſuits, ranged through each ſect in turn, and found nothing concluſive or ſatisfactory. The Platonic ſyſtem, which he had laſt endeavoured to fathom, appeared to him moſt ſpecious and attractive. When taking one of his contemplative walks by the ſea ſide, he providentially met an aged Chriſtian on the ſhore, where he was muſing, and one queſtion having led to another, the unknown ſtranger directed him to the prophets as more antient

tient and infinitely wiſer than all the philoſophers. He opened to him the leading principles of the Chriſtian diſpenſation—and exhorted him above all things to pray to God and his Chriſt, to enlighten his underſtanding. They parted; remained unknown to each other; but from that moment a new ſcene opened to Juſtin's view. He examined the Scriptures of truth, and became, profeſſionally at leaſt, a Chriſtian; to confirm him in which, the ſerenity of the martyrs greatly contributed.

Every intimation in hiſtory, if but collaterally, demonſtrates the frequency of the execution of Chriſtians for their religion in various parts of the world; and Alexandria was not the leaſt marked with the blood of the ſlain.

Juſtin become now profeſſionally a Chriſtian; yet, ſtill more than half philoſopher in ſentiment, and his garb unchanged, he proceeded to Rome, the ſeat of empire, to combat heretics, and preſent to the Emperor Pius, his firſt apology for his Chriſtian brethren, which has been mentioned. He therein completely refutes the charges brought againſt them, deſcribes their worſhip, and vindicates their purity and ſimplicity.

He

He had obſerved in his apology, how few Jews had ever embraced Chriſtianity, and how the Scriptures had been fulfilled in them. Trypho, the Jew, at Epheſus encountered him. Their dialogues on that occaſion, though little intereſting, are ſtill extant.

After a conſiderable abſence, returning to Rome, the bloody perſecution of his brethren, rouſed his ſpirit to addreſs the bitter philoſophic Aurelius, on the cruelty and injuſtice of theſe executions. Creſcens, a profligate philoſopher, whom he had rebuked for his iniquities, impeached him before the Præfect, and his ſophiſt's garb was no protection to his perſon, he was committed to priſon, and with others his companions, executed, after being interrogated and threatened in vain by the Præfect of the city; but he ſteadily avowed his veneration for Chriſt, and his refuſal to comply with every act of idolatry required of him. An. 163.

It is impoſſible not to reverence the martyr, and to hope that the root of the matter was in him; but truth compels me to acknowledge, that many things ſuſpicious are found in his writings. He ſeems to confeſs Jeſus as the true God, but we wiſh for a more explicit teſtimony; an Arian might ſubſcribe to his confeſſion. He ſpeaks of juſtification,

cation, regeneration, and forgiveneſs of paſt ſins through Jeſus Chriſt—acknowledges the neceſſity of Divine illumination—and the certain puniſhment of the wicked in torment eternal: ſo far all appears well and conſonant with truth; but his Platonic opinions blend with his Chriſtian profeſſion. He inſinuates, that Plato and Chriſt taught nearly the ſame doctrines—ſuppoſes a general illumination from God in the pagan ſophiſts, a particle of the Divine word, which he calls the Son of God, and innate in every man. The high panegyric of Socrates, an idolater in the laſt act of his life, and his reaſoning on the freedom of the human will, nearly in the ſtrain of the modern followers of Arminius, leave evident tokens, that though it may be hoped he was a good man at bottom, and a Chriſtian, yet, ſtill he remained a Platoniſt, a myſtic, a ſelf-ſufficient patron of innate moral power, and far too philoſophical to be ſcriptural. The wiſdom of the ſchools of Alexandria had darkened the brightneſs of evangelical glory in his mind, and rendered him in many points of Chriſtian doctrine confuſed, if not erroneous and heretical; and, like many of the fathers, a very miſerable guide to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jeſus.

IRENÆUS.

IRENÆUS.

Elected Biſhop	-	An. 178
Martyred about	-	203

Irenæus ſucceeded Pothinus, the ſucceſsful evangeliſt of the church of Lyons, over which he preſided. He had come from Smyrna, and with ſingular bleſſing ſpread the knowledge of ſalvation in that part of Gaul. Irenæus, his preſbyter, was choſen in his place. He was a Greek, and learned the barbarous language of Gaul, in order to be able to inſtruct the people; a proof that the gift of tongues had probably now ceaſed. The labours of his miniſtry were great, and of his writings ſtill greater. He combated all the hereſies then ſubſiſting in the Church. The very names of theſe are an awful witneſs how much, and among how many, the purity of the Chriſtian doctrine and practice had begun to be corrupted. He is far more valuable in confuting his adverſaries, than in his delineation of the evangelical truth. Here, like Juſtin, his philoſophic opinions mingle with and debaſe the Chriſtian purity. He quits the ſcriptural grounds of God's election, and grace, and ſuppoſes all that ſelf-ſufficiency of the human intellect, and human agency, which beſpeaks a man too little acquainted with his own heart. He argues from tradition more than Scripture, and has given the ſtrong handle for the papiſtical abuſe ſince

ſince made of it. Indeed it muſt be acknowledged, that there is ſcarce one of the fathers, who hath not expreſſed himſelf in terms ſo indiſtinct, or ſo improper, as to afford to every modern heretic ſome ground of argument to ſupport their ſeveral ſentiments. Irenæus, however, has in an unequivocal manner avowed the deity of our Saviour, the redemption effected by his blood, and our union in the ſecond Adam, Jeſus Chriſt; though mixed with a farrago of philoſophic notions. Speaking of the miniſters before him, he calls them *the preſbyters* who walked with the apoſtles, and diſtinguiſhes his friend and brother Polycarp, as that *bleſſed apoſtolical preſbyter*, a title ſtill, it ſeems, of firſt eminence; but his character is leſs marked by his writings than by his miniſtry and ſufferings. The church of Lyons was expoſed to the moſt violent ſtorm of perſecution, and no where, if we may believe tradition, did the power of the grace of Jeſus more eminently appear, than under the miniſtry of Irenæus and Pothinus. The part of an epiſtle preſerved in Euſebius, gives a noble account of the holy army of martyrs, ſuffering with ſuch propriety and conſtancy; from the man of faſhion to the ſervant; from the bold champion to the tender youth, with the exalted glory of the feebler ſex, ſubmitting to every indignity and torment: the miſtreſs and her female ſlave, together witneſſing to the power of the grace of Jeſus, enabling

bling them to triumph over all the cruel and malicious devices of their perſecutors. I read, I wonder, and adore! Whether Irenæus fell in the general maſſacre, or was reſerved for a future martyrdom, is not abſolutely certain: the firſt ſtrokes of vengeance would naturally light on thoſe who preſided in the Chriſtian aſſemblies. A biſhop, a preſbyter, then, muſt have renounced his office, or not counted his life dear unto himſelf. Let not the moderns read this as a romance, or fancy from any preſent contraſt, that Chriſtianity hath altered its nature. The ſame enmity againſt it is ſtill in the human heart. Providentially a milder ſyſtem of government prevails; but the time again may come to try, what manner of ſpirit we are of; and it is an awful truth, that he who is not ready to lay down his life for Chriſt's ſake, gives no concluſive evidence of his true diſcipleſhip. Ah! how would our ranks be thinned, were ſuch a day as Lyons experienced to return?

TERTULLIAN.

Flouriſhed from 194 to 220.

Tertullian is a ſtriking inſtance, how much wiſdom and weakneſs, learning and ignorance, faith and folly, truth and error, goodneſs and deluſion, may be mixed up in the compoſition of the ſame perſon. No man more diſtinguiſhed himſelf in defence

defence of the Chriſtians, or poſſeſſed a larger fund of all that was in that day eſteemed deep, philoſophical reſearch. Yet no man exhauſted his zeal more about trifles, or ſet more value upon will-worſhip and voluntary humility; auſtere, melancholic, monkiſh, ſuperſtitious, credulous. Severe to himſelf, as to others, he preſents a face, as forbidding as his writings are difficult, and ſtuffed with abſurdities, that will ill repay the labour of peruſal. Diſpleaſed with the laxity of diſcipline, he quitted the church of Carthage to join the *Montaniſts*; and inſenſible to his own corruptions, as impitiable to the infirmities of others, his teaching breathes a harſhneſs of cenſure, the very reverſe of Chriſtian mildneſs and patience. But I quit a ſubject ſo unpleaſant, which the farther we enquire leaves the more diſagreeable impreſſion of a character, that with all theſe faults and follies, was not deſtitute of peculiar excellencies; on theſe I ſhall more delight to dwell. He ſhall ſpeak for himſelf. Ad Scap. ch. ii. "It is every man's right and "natural claim to worſhip as he judges fit. One "man's religion neither profits nor injures an- "other. It is contrary to the nature of religion, "to uſe compulſion with any man to be religious; "this can only be derived from choice, and not, "coercion. The ſacrifices of God muſt be the "offering of a willing mind."

I copy another paſſage from Milner out of his Apology. "We look up to heaven with 'out-
"ſtretched hands, becauſe they are harmleſs, &c."
"without a prompter, becauſe we pray from the
"heart." "We pray for the Emperor, whatever
"Cæſar would wiſh for himſelf in his public and
"private capacity. I cannot ſolicit theſe things
"from any other than him from whom I know I
"ſhall obtain them; becauſe he alone can do theſe
"things; and I am he who may expect them of
"him; being his ſervant, who worſhip him alone,
"and loſe my life for his ſervice." "Were we
"diſpoſed to return evil for evil, it were eaſy for
"us to avenge the injuries which we ſuſtain; but
"God forbid that his people ſhould vindicate
"themſelves by human fire, or be reluctant to en-
"dure that by which their ſincerity is evinced.
"Were we diſpoſed to act the part, I will not ſay,
"of ſecret aſſaſſins, but of open enemies, ſhould
"we want forces or numbers? Are we not diſ-
"perſed through the world? It is true we are but
"of yeſterday, and yet we have filled all your
"places, cities, iſlands, caſtles, boroughs, coun-
"ſels, camps, courts, palaces, ſenate, forum. We
"leave you only your temples. To what war
"ſhould we not be ready, and well prepared, even
"though unequal in numbers, we who die with
"ſo much pleaſure? were it not that our religion
"requires us rather to ſuffer death, than inflict it.

"Were

" Were we to make a general ſeceſſion from your " dominions, you would be aſtoniſhed at your ſo- " litude."

Again, " We are dead to all ideas of honour " and dignity. Nothing is more foreign to us, " than political concerns. The whole world is our " republic."

" We are a body united in one bond of religion, " diſcipline, and hope. We meet in our aſſem- " blies for prayer. We are compelled to have re- " courſe to *the Divine Oracles* for caution and re- " collection on all occaſions. We nouriſh our faith " by the word of God, we erect our hope, we fix " our confidence, we ſtrengthen our diſcipline, by " repeatedly inculcating precepts, exhortations, " corrections, and excommunication, when it is " needful. The laſt, as being in the ſight of God, " is of great weight, and a preſumptive prelude of " the future judgment; if any behave in ſo ſcan- " dalous a manner as to be debarred from the holy " communion. Thoſe who preſide among us, are " elderly perſons, not diſtinguiſhed for opulence, " but worth of character, &c." Their noble cha- rities to brethren and enemies—their ſtrict juſtice in paying every tax and impoſition—without fraud or colluſion, &c. with other particulars, raiſe the

higheſt monument to their integrity, patience, and purity.

I cannot diſmiſs this Apology, without noticing the unimpeachable veracity of the truths aſſerted, which, if not capable of proof indiſputable, would have been immediately detected, retorted, and covered the apologiſt with confuſion. How truly great does the body of Chriſtians then appear, and how little do we appear in compariſon with them?

Every thing here advanced by Tertullian reſpecting the number and conduct of the Chriſtians, is fully corroborated by the preceding letters of Pliny and Trajan. A few particulars ſhall be recapitulated reſpecting the Church in that day.

1. The preſbyters who preſided, were elected by the Church, not for any diſtinction, but ſolely *worth of character.*

2. In the public worſhip, *prayer from the heart,* was the univerſal uſage, *without a prompter.*

3. *Honour and dignities* were diſclaimed by every Chriſtian, as not at all entering into their views, or objects.

4. They

4. They buſied themſelves in *no political conteſts.* Their kingdom was of another world. Even where their numbers and power were ſufficient to reſiſt, they choſe to vanquiſh their enemies by ſuffering and patience, rather than by arms.

5. No perſon whoſe conduct was *in any manner offenſive*, and contrary to the goſpel precepts, could *join in their communion.* So far therefore from the practices with which they were charged, being true, their very diſcipline demonſtrated the falſehood of their accuſers.

6. Men who *made conſcience of paying taxes* to Cæſar, which they might have evaded with impunity, could not but *conſcientiouſly diſcharge every other debt and obligation.*

7. *Liberality*, ſuch as they exerciſed to all men, demonſtrated their victory over all avaricious deſires; the deadneſs of their affections to this world, and the fixedneſs of their ſouls on a better.

8. Though Tertullian himſelf affords but a very wretched ſpecimen of Chriſtianity, his Apology demonſtrates, that in all the great and glorious features of this divine religion, there was a people in that day eminently to the praiſe of the glory of God's grace.

There are other perſonages many and reſpectable, whom I muſt paſs over; though famous in their generation, men of renown. Pantænus, of Alexandria; Dionyſius, of Corinth; Theophilus, of Antioch; Melito, of Sardis; Apollinaris, of Hierapolis; Athenagoras and others, whoſe writings made them noticed in their day, and have been ſo far preſerved to us, as to prove, that the faith once delivered to the ſaints, in the Scriptures of truth, was ſtill preſerved in its purity. And though in many of them, it was obſcured by philoſophic novelties, and platonic explications, yet the great foundations of a triune God—the incarnation of Jehovah the Son—the power of the Holy Ghoſt upon the conſcience—the one atonement—the efficacy of faith—and the neceſſity of holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord—theſe may be found in all the earlier writers; too often indeed mixed with fables; dubious miracles; fanciful explanations; abſurd allegories, and practices, as indefenſible as deſtitute of all authority from the oracles of God.

I may add, as my own opinion, that the beſt part of the Church was not that which was *moſt viſible*. I ſhould expect to find the greateſt purity of doctrine, and ſimplicity of practice, among, not the wiſer philoſophic Chriſtians, but the more unlettered and inferior paſtors and people, who without

out buſying themſelves about theſe novelties, or being able to read Hermes or Plato, contented themſelves with the evangeliſts and epiſtles, and lived and died in obſcurity, examples of every thing that is excellent, and of good report. But they leave no writings that attract curioſity, nor ſtand in any eminence of ſtation or literature, to engage that admiration which is oftener attached to what is counted *great*, than to what is ſimply GOOD.

CHAP. IV.

GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH, RITES AND CEREMONIES.

IT is evident to every one who reads eccleſiaſtical hiſtory with an unprejudiced mind, how ſoon a ſpirit of pride and pre-eminence began to debaſe the miniſters of the ſanctuary: as according to the miſerable nature of man, every diſtinction is liable to abuſe. From the equality of the firſt paſtors, a ſecond race aſcended one ſtep above their fellows, and from the greater progreſs of Chriſtianity, and the neceſſary calls to attend to the general intereſts of the whole, ſuperiority of ſome over others, became eſtabliſhed by univerſal conſent. Inſtead of little houſeholds united under one preſbyter, the churches in many places became numerous, as well as the multitude of attendants in each. Towns and diſtricts adjacent naturally became connected, a preſident was found neceſſary. Where a vaſt body of Chriſtians was collected, one man was inſufficient for all the calls of the church and people. Aſſiſtants were taken in, and deacons firſt inſtituted for the care of the poor only, became employed in other inferior departments of miniſterial ſervice.

From

From a ſingle ſociety governed by its own members, under apoſtolic ſuperintendence, union was formed between ſeveral, and a ſuperior choſen by general ſuffrage, or received from the oldeſt congregation. Many churches were thus aſſociated, and on occaſions of general concern they met to conſult in a body, compoſed of the principal perſons deputed from the ſeveral ſocieties, of which the paſtor or biſhop was always one. At firſt they appeared merely as the delegates of the reſpective congregations; but when thus frequently aſſembled, they ſoon began to aſſume authority, and imperceptibly to act in their own name, inſtead of that of the people, to preſcribe without conſulting them; and gradually ſeparating themſelves as a clerical body, too frequently endeavoured to aggrandize themſelves; arrogating privileges and diſtinctions, unknown in the firſt lowly days of the Church: and riſing in ſelf-importance on every acquiſition of power to which veneration for their leaders made the people ſubmit. Notwithſtanding the piety, humility and prudence of the beſt, the loftier and more imperious, generally took the lead in their ſynods; influence degenerated into dominion, and counſels into canons.

As the borders of Chriſtianity were enlarged, and the number of biſhops encreaſed, they naturally united in one great confederate republic, of which they

they were become the heads and leaders: and as at firſt a biſhop or biſhops were appointed, where they had ſeveral preſbyters their aſſiſtants, ſo another ſtep became neceſſary, when a large diſtrict or province met in aſſembly, and many biſhops were preſent; a ſuperior was ſtill needful for order, to manage debates, and maintain uniformity in their ſeſſions. Then archbiſhops aroſe: and as the Church thus grew more monarchical, great capitals and very extenſive ſees mounted into patriarchs: till at laſt the attempt to imitate imperial ſtate, led to one ſupreme viſible head: though this was only after ages of abuſe.

As pride and worldly mindedneſs muſt go hand in hand, aſſumed pomp and dignity required a ſort of maintenance very different from the ſtate, when the paſtor wrought with his own hands to miniſter to his neceſſities, and laboured by day, that he might ſerve the Church by night. The idea of prieſthood had yet ſcarcely entered into the Chriſtian ſanctuary, as there remained no more ſacrifice for ſin, and but one high-prieſt of our profeſſion, Jeſus Chriſt. But on the diſſolution of the whole Jewiſh œconomy under Adrian, when the power of the aſſociated clergy began to put forth its bud, the ambitious and deſigning ſuggeſted, what many of the reſt received in their ſimplicity, that the ſucceſſion to theſe honours now devolved upon them, and that the

the biſhop ſtood in the place of the high-prieſt; the preſbyters were prieſts, and the deacons, levites: and ſo a train of conſequences followed. Thus a new tribe aroſe compleatly ſeparated from their brethren, of clergy diſtinct from laity. Men, ſacred by office, excluſive of a divine call and real worth. The altar indeed was not yet erected, nor the unbloody ſacrifice of the Euchariſt perfected; but it approached by haſty ſtrides, to add greater ſanctity to the prieſthood, and the not unpleaſant adjunct of the divine right of tythes, attached to the divine right of epiſcopacy.

Theſe abuſes indeed grew not up at once. The remaining piety and purity of the true Church, and multitudes of its primitive paſtors retarded the progreſs of wordly-mindedneſs and ambition, till the union of Church and State in the eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity under Conſtantine, pretty nearly compleated the worldly ſyſtem. The conſummation of abuſe and wickedneſs in the mother of harlots, and all abominations ſucceeded, and long has the earth, (I can hardly call it the Church) groaned under the anti-chriſtian tyranny.

The ſimplicity of the primitive worſhip contraſted with the pomp of paganiſm was ſtriking. It was concluded by the heathen, that they who had neither altar, victim, prieſt, or ſacrifice, muſt be atheiſts,

atheiſts, and without God in the world. Thoſe who were now riſing into ſelf-created eminence, had therefore little difficulty to perſuade, that it would be for the intereſts and honour of Chriſtianity, to remove theſe objections of the Gentiles, by very harmleſs but uſeful alterations. Though magnificent temples had not yet ariſen, the names of things began to change. There were already *prieſts*; and *oblations* were eaſily rendered *ſacrifices*. The ſeparation of the clergy as a body, became more diſcriminated by their habits. *High-prieſts* muſt have more ſplendid robes than the ſimple tunic of linen. A variety of new ceremonies was invented to add dignity to the myſteries of Chriſtianity, and obviate the objections to its meanneſs and ſimplicity. And as the populace were particularly attached to their idolatry by the feſtivals in honour of their heroes and their gods; and delighted with the games and paſtimes on theſe occaſions: the great Gregory Thaumaturgus, ſhortly afterwards contrived to bilk the devil, by granting the people the indulgence of all the ſame pleaſures of feaſting, ſporting, and dancing at the tombs, and on the anniverſary of the martyrs, as they had been accuſtomed to, in the temples of their gods, very wiſely and chriſtianly ſuppoſing, that thus, " *Sua* " *ſponte ad honeſtiorem, et accuratiorem vitæ rationem* " *tranſirent.*" " Of their own accord they would " quit their idolatry, and return to a more virtuous

" and

"and regular courſe of life." I muſt be exceedingly hard drove for a Chriſtian, before I can put ſuch men as Gregory Thaumaturgus into the number.

The feaſt of Eaſter, in memory of the paſſion and reſurrection of Chriſt was generally obſerved amongſt Chriſtians. But even the proper day gave occaſion for bitter diſpute and ſharp anathemas. Ah! how feeble muſt be the voice of true Chriſtianity in thoſe who could thus curſe their brethren for ſuch trifles!

The bleſſed ordinance of the commemoration of the ſacrifice of Chriſt, and of the benefits which we receive thereby, continued to be celebrated weekly: but with ſome additional ceremonies. The wine was now mixed with water; the bread divided in pieces, and ſent to the ſick and abſent. It became alſo increaſingly important, and ſuppoſed eſſential to ſalvation; and therefore miniſtered to infants; a proof of their being baptiſed.

The adminiſtration of baptiſm was now only admitted from Eaſter to Whitſuntide, which began to be a feſtival. None could baptize but the biſhop, or a preſbyter deputed by him. The adult converts and the children of Chriſtian parents were admitted

mitted into the Church by immerſion, ſigned with the croſs; and milk and honey adminiſtered concluded the ceremony. So multiplied became the rites even of this ſecond century.

It is always obſervable, that the forms of religion encreaſe, juſt in proportion as the power of godlineſs is loſt.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

OF THE SPIRITUAL AND TRUE CHURCH.

IT is impoſſible to have reviewed the ſavage cruelty of perſecutors, and the faith and patience of the ſaints, and not behold a ſtriking ſpecimen of the Church of the living God. Amidſt all the miſtakes of the ſincere; the departures of heretics from the faith; and of too many profeſſors from the life of godlineſs; a bleſſed company of faithful people, witneſſes for Chriſt, ſtill encreaſed and multiplied on the earth. Every church preſented a numerous body of worſhippers, whom no dangers could intimidate, nor earthly advantages tempt to renounce their crucified Maſter. And with all, the unhallowed mixtures, which we cannot but lament, and condemn, a truly holy ſeed ſprang up amidſt the tares of philoſophy, and the rank weeds of pride, which the great enemy had plentifully diſſeminated: even among thoſe branded with the name of heretics, I cannot doubt but that there were found many living members of Chriſt's body; but the great maſs of the faithful, and the great power of religion were to be ſought in the lower orders of clergy and people, who buſied themſelves

themſelves not with philoſophic inveſtigations; joined in no contentions for pre-eminence or advantage; nor affected the auſterities of hereſiarchs; but ſimply receiving the truth as it is in Jeſus, ſearched the Scriptures for the mind of God, and followed it in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity. The doctrine in all the churches ſeems fundamentally yet preſerved pure; and the practice could not have much degenerated, where ſo many were ready to lay down their lives in hopes of a joyful reſurrection; a ſtate highly incompatible with a ſenſe of hypocriſy, or allowed corruption. And indeed, all the apologies, and the evidence which univerſally appears from enemies, as well as friends, declare the truth and fidelity of the general body of thoſe, who bore and owned the Chriſtian name.

That there were always hypocrites in the Church, and even martyrs to falſe principles, I can readily believe; but every view of the whole demonſtrates, that there was a true Church of faithful men, who loved our Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity; worſhipped him in ſpirit; and looked for an eternal reſt, ready to be offered in flames, rather than deny the Lord that bought them. I read with grief, the miſtakes, the follies, the credulity, the hereſies, of many; but I contemplate with greater delight and veneration, the ſtedfaſtneſs in the faith; the ſimplicity which is in Chriſt; and the exemplary purity of others,

others, who living adorned, and dying glorified, the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Hitherto no general departure from the truth, no marked apoſtacy appears. Epiſcopal power was indeed extended, but many of theſe biſhops were evidently the beſt of men, and moſt zealous advocates for truth. Profane learning had more abundantly entered the Church, but it furniſhed able advocates; if not the moſt edifying to the people of God, yet ſuppoſed more qualified to confute their enemies. Perſecution had not abated its fury, nor had the faith and patience of the ſaints failed. There were ſpots and blemiſhes among them, and ſeeds ſown of deleterious quality; but as yet the Church was a glorious Church, red in her apparel, and precious in the ſight of the Lord, of life and glory.

SECT. IV.

TO THE DEATH OF CYPRIAN—AND THE END OF THE THIRD CENTURY.

CHAP. I.

SUFFERINGS OF THE CHURCH.

DURING the ſhort reigns of Pertinax and Julian, the humanity of Commodus ſeemed to prevail above the brutality of an Antonine, and the Church, enjoying quiet from the more bloody ravages of perſecution, encreaſed in number, and was edified.

AN. 202. Severus, during the firſt years of his ſucceſſion, trod in the ſteps of his immediate predeceſſors. Though a ſevere law was paſſed, prohibiting any man to change the religion of his anceſtors for the Jewiſh or Chriſtian, it was only in the tenth year of his reign, and the beginning of the third century, that his rage burſt

forth as fire againſt the Chriſtians. Whatever was the cauſe of this change, the conſequences were terribly fatal to the Church of Chriſt. Alexandria, Scillita, Carthage, and other cities of the African church were particularly expoſed. The father of Origen ſuffered, and he himſelf, though a youth, hardly eſcaped; eager to offer himſelf to martyrdom. Multitudes were dragged to priſon and to death; and many a heroine gave noble proof of the ſtrength of faith in the weaker veſſel. The ſtory of Perpetua and Felicitas, if genuine, contains traits that touch the moſt inſenſible, and cannot be yet read without a tear. It is indeed to be lamented, that pious frauds detected, have often raiſed ſuſpicion of what is beſt authenticated; and truth itſelf, dreſſed in theſe meretricious ornaments, is robbed of its tranſcendent beauty. Auſtin believed, and quoted this example, and there is nothing in the ſtory, as related by Euſebius, but what is highly credible.

Lyons again was dyed with the blood of martyrs, and Irenæus, who is by ſome ſuppoſed to have ſurvived the former ſtorm, either now, or under Valerian, received the crown of martyrdom.

Many are ſaid to have purchaſed connivance from the government, and to have bought off the informers, and thereby eſcaped the fury of the perſecution:

ſecution: and if they could redeem their lives by parting with their ſubſtance, I ſee nothing in this to condemn. The rigid caſuiſts of that day, however, highly cenſured the practice, and too many appeared emulous to ruſh upon unneceſſary danger, and to court martyrdom.

An. 211. Death delivered the Church from this ſcourge, and brought forward the infamous *Caracalla* to be the protector of Chriſt's ſuffering people. Few men have exceeded him in the atrocities of vice; but an early attachment to a Chriſtian nurſe is ſaid to have prejudiced him in their favour ever after: on ſuch ſlight circumſtances, turn matters of the greateſt moment. During his ſix years reign, the Chriſtians enjoyed full toleration unmoleſted, which continued under the monſter Heliogabalus; who was too much engroſſed with the ſcience of eating to attend to other cares. His contraſt in rigid virtue, Alexander Severus continued a meaſure of the ſame kindneſs, influenced, it is ſaid, by his mother Julia, who favoured Chriſtianity. Nay, he ſo far commended the Saviour, as to count him worthy of a ſtatue among the demi-gods and heroes; but the ſtatutes againſt Chriſtianity remained unrepealed; and though the penal laws ſlumbered, it was always in the power of a malignant magiſtrate to be miſchievous; and therefore there were not wanting

inſtances of murder and martyrdom, inflicted under colour of the law, during the reigns of the moſt peaceable princes. An. 218—222.

An. 235. Maximin, who murdered Severus, dreaded the reſentment of the Chriſtians, becauſe the laſt Emperor had favoured them, and iſſued his bloody edicts againſt the biſhops and paſtors of the Chriſtian Church; and with them were involved many of the faithful. Perſecution once ſtirred up and promoted, wicked magiſtrates will always be ready to puſh it to extremes—many ſuffered; but death, after a three years' reign, delivered the world from this tyrant. A haſty ſucceſſion of Pupienus and Balbinus, followed by Gordian and Philip, the laſt reputed half a Chriſtian, procured a calm for the perſecuted Church, which continued till the middle of the century; when the acceſſion of Decius to the imperial throne, once more opened the gates of hell, and let looſe upon the defenceleſs churches the mercileſs executioners, who deluged the earth with blood. An. 238—249.

From whatever cauſe, or apprehenſion of danger, this Emperor's prejudices againſt the Chriſtians aroſe, certain it is, that ſhort as his reign was, never did the Church ſuffer from her moſt invenomed enemies ſeverer treatment. Multitudes fell in every province. The orders to all prætors and

and magiſtrates, extended to the extirpation of the Chriſtian name; and whilſt multitudes braved all the rigours of puniſhment, more, unhappily, gave proofs of their weakneſs, and introduced by the immenſity of their numbers, difficulties and diſputes about their re-admiſſion to the Church, unto which many deſired to return. Gallus, AN. 251. and Voluſianus, though with leſs fury, 253. continued the perſecution. *Valerian* was at firſt more friendly, and extinguiſhed the fires which had been kindled; but falling under the influence of Macrianus, a pagan bigot, his prime miniſter, freſh edicts were publiſhed againſt the aſſemblies of the faithful; their principal biſhops ſent into baniſhment; and many executed with the moſt lingering torments. Divine Providence interpoſed, and delivered him a captive to his enemies. His ſon *Gallienus*, and his ſucceſſor *Claudius*, either more engaged in their own concerns, or leſs malignant, ſuffered the Church to enjoy a few years reſpite; and the meditated deſtruction of the Chriſtian name by *Aurelian* was prevented by his violent death. *Tacitus*, his ſucceſſor, ſoon left the empty throne, to *Probus*. *Carus*, and his ſons, followed; and *Dioclefian* maintained for the firſt eighteen years of his reign, the peace which, with few interruptions, the Church had enjoyed for the ſpace of forty years, AN. 260—284.

But forty years of peace, though it had greatly ſpread the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, had introduced a ſpirit of worldlineſs and decay. The Church became more and more *external*; the power of the clergy began to advance with haſty ſtrides; and the ſeeds of eclectic philoſophy produced a plenteous crop of hereſies; which wakened up clamour to ſuppreſs, and councils to condemn them, and tended abundantly to increaſe clerical pretenſions.

Yet, at no time had the ſtruggles between Paganiſm and Chriſtianity been more ſevere, or the martyrs more abundant, than towards the middle of this century; and from the beginning of it the conflict had been ſharply carried on. The heathen prieſts envious, and enraged to ſee their craft in danger, and their temples deſerted, moved heaven and earth to ſtop the defection from idolatry, and to bring back the apoſtates. The Jews expreſſed their rooted enmity on every occaſion, and the philoſophic ſects, with Lucian at their head, whetted the edge of argument and ridicule againſt the diſciples of the crucified Nazarene. But above all, the prætors and magiſtrates, as paſſion, covetouſneſs, or ſuperſtition goaded, enforced the edicts of the cruel Emperors; and under colour of executing the laws, gratified every unhallowed diſpoſition of the human heart. The number of ſufferers

in

in all the various modes invented by perſecutors, it is impoſſible to calculate—a few perſons have been mentioned: but in the vaſt extent of the Roman Empire, where the ſame laws ſubſiſted, and the ſame ſpirit prevailed, with all the poſſible ſoftenings of a Gibbon, and others, to diminiſh the ſufferings of martyrs, and rob the Church of this teſtimony of their faith and patience, the ſufferers muſt have been immenſe; and if we had no records of a thouſand facts corroborative of the truth, the very nature of man, under ſuch a ſtate of ſociety, would compel us to form this concluſion. I admit, that many additions have been made to the truth; many pious frauds palmed upon credulity; and in the true ſtory, circumſtances interpolated, which too partial friendſhip ſuggeſted for the honour of the martyr; but taking the matter with all the objections and ingenious ſuſpicions that infidelity can raiſe, the fact will remain unimpeachable; that in this century, many, in a great variety of places, of every age, ſex, and condition, even to the very ſlaves, were tortured, for the name of Jeſus, not accepting deliverance on the conditions of idolatry, that they might obtain a better reſurrection: and however cold-blooded and atheiſtical hiſtorians may ſeek to exalt their philoſophic heathen brethren, and to blazon the characters of the moſt impious and cruel of mankind, the Trajans, the Antonines, and the Deciuſes;

ciuſes; to invent ſpecious reaſons for their enmity, and excuſes for their atrocities; degrading the Chriſtians and their character by every baſe ſuggeſtion; and pleading the errors and miſtakes of a few, to depreciate the excellence of the body: yet will the Church be found a glorious Church, coming through the fire of temptation, and demonſtrating its divine original, and the omnipotent power of its exalted Head, in conquering all difficulties, riſing ſuperior to all ſuffering, overturning every mound of ſuperſtition, confounding every device of proud philoſophy; triumphant over all the oppoſition, wiſdom, and prejudices of mankind, through the ſimple preaching of the croſs of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. The man who can conſider this impartially, and continue an unbeliever, believes a great deal more than I do, and muſt have recourſe to a credulity much greater than any which he preſumes to ridicule.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

ON THE HERESIES OF THE THIRD CENTURY.

IT muſt needs be that offences come. The pride of wiſdom, and the corruption of the human heart, naturally produce error and evil; but wo to thoſe in whom they originate. The ſeeds already ſown began to ſhoot forth with luxuriant foliage, and the tares in many places to overſhadow, if not to choak the wheat. The miſeries which the Church ſuffered, occaſionally checked their growth, and made a ſeparation between the precious and vile; yet the evil itſelf continued to ſpread. During the intervals of perſecution, and in many places where money or intereſt procured an exemption from the penal ſtatutes, the Chriſtians enjoyed a ſtate of proſperity, were connived at in the army, had preferment at court; were unmoleſted in their profeſſion; and throve in the world by their temperance, induſtry, and frugality. Abundance, as it always has done, proved a ſnare. To be *rich*, without *truſting* in uncertain riches, and *preferred* without feeling the pride of exaltation, is a rare attainment.

Chriſtianity

Chriſtianity had now alſo aſſumed the philoſophic garb, and many of her moſt famed doctors became eminent for their ſcience, and teachers of the eclectic philoſophy. The ſchools of Alexandria, with Origen at their head, and their manner of tuition, began to produce an awful departure from the ſimplicity which is in Chriſt. In order to meet the various philoſophic ſects on their own ground, and to ſoften down their prejudices againſt the Croſs, a mode of arguing and diſputation was admitted, very different from "thus ſaith the Lord;" and a general admiſſion granted, that *Paganiſm included many principles of Chriſtianity*; and that the philoſophy of Plato, Hermes, and Pythagoras perfectly correſponded with the leading doctrines of the great Chriſtian teacher, Jeſus Chriſt. Indeed to reconcile theſe together, and to make the tranſition eaſy from heatheniſm and platoniſm, to the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, was one of the great objects of its moſt renowned defenders. Can it be wondered then, that error entered at a thouſand doors, when conceſſions the moſt unſcriptural were admitted, opinions the moſt uncongenial reconciled, and ſo great a ſtreſs laid on the importance of philoſophic attainments, as to raiſe thoſe to the higheſt pinnacle of human glory, who diſplayed the ſtrongeſt powers, and the largeſt meaſure of theſe acquiſitions of ſcience falſely ſo called? As the leading feature of this philoſophy, begun chiefly

chiefly by Ammonius, and carried to its ſummit by his famed diſciple Plotinus, was, "that truth "muſt be impartially ſought, and collected from "all the various ſyſtems in which it had been "diſperſed," the ſacred circle of revelation no longer afforded a boundary for religious knowledge; but the ſchools of the ſtoic, the epicurean, and academic, muſt be all explored; and the precious metal, ſeparated from the droſs of the various philoſophic ſects, be formed into one maſs of ſolid excellence.

Since human reaſon alone was aſſerted to be the proper and competent judge, and ſovereign tribunal, to which every doctrine muſt be ſubmitted, *revealed* truths could only be received or rejected according as they paſſed the philoſophic ordeal. The imbecillity of the human intellect, and its incompetence to fathom the deep things of God, were utterly denied. The proud ſophiſt ſeated on his throne, ſummoned to his bar Jeſus Chriſt and Plato; Moſes and Pythagoras, with equal arrogance, canvaſſed their pretenſions with the ſame freedom and liberty, and ſelected from each according to his own opinion.

From ſuch a motly religion, it was impoſſible even in the eclectic ſchool, but a thouſand different concluſions ſhould be formed, as men were diſpoſed

diſpoſed to view this or that doctrine in different lights; with different meaſures of knowledge on the ſubject; or capacities to form a judgment of the ſeveral works peruſed or produced by the lecturer. And as a divine revelation, to which implicit obedience ſhould be paid was rejected; and a divine interpreter to illuminate the darkneſs of the human mind was thus exploded, the very eſſential principles of true Chriſtianity were inadmiſſible into the whole of this ſyſtem. Yet as the firſt of their opinions, the unity of the godhead was drawn from revelation, and mixed up with the other ingredients of the ſchools; and eſpecially with the reveries of Plato, the moſt admired ſophiſt; though in eſſence, their religion was deiſm, yet many made profeſſion of Chriſtianity. With theſe, ORIGEN, the great oracle of the day, aſſociated: and to render Chriſtianity more palatable and rational, debaſed the pure doctrines of the Croſs, with the unſcriptural alloys of human wiſdom and eclectic ſcience. Caſting his preponderating weight, as Moſheim obſerves, into the ſcale of *the tranſcendent excellence and utility of human learning, in matters of religion*; a point till then ſtrongly debated by Chriſtians of purer faith and greater ſimplicity, as well as equal, if not ſuperior numbers: but now borne down by authority, the unlearned and ſimpler Chriſtians retired with the Bible from the field of controverſy, and left the honours of the day to Plato,

Plato, Plotinus, and the philoſophic ſchool of Origen. Where truth remained, a gracious heart can be at no loſs to diſcover.

The myſtery of God, and of the Father and of Chriſt, being thus ſubjected to philoſophical inveſtigation, and clothed in ſcholaſtic terms of Grecian ſcience, a hoſt of heretical tenets ſprung up in the eclectic ſchool, as ſnakes in a dunghill. The gnoſtics of the former age, now met new adverſaries, Plotinus againſt Adelphius, and Origen againſt both; and in this diſpute the Chriſtian doctrine and ſpirit alike ſuffered violence, and anathemas began to be plentifully hurled from combatant to combatant.

AN. 240—269. As the doctrine of the Trinity was the moſt inexplicable, on *this*, ingenuity exhauſted itſelf. NOETUS broached the hereſy of the Patripaſſians, or the Father ſuffering in Chriſt: SABELLIUS followed in a new modification of the ſame ſentiment; and BARYLLUS added different ideas to the ſame original dogma. Whilſt PAUL of SAMOSATA, the father of modern ſocinians, explained away the divine perſons; allowed only the Son and Spirit to exiſt in God as the faculty of reaſon, and activity in man: affirmed that Chriſt was a mere man, and received this reaſon from the Father;

Father; and by his agency wrought miracles; and that on this account only he might be called God. But all theſe novelties were wrapped in expreſſions the moſt ambiguous, and capable of endleſs explications. This gave occaſion to many an epiſcopal ſynod, where theſe ſentiments afforded abundant matter of diſcuſſion, and where zeal exhauſted itſelf in canons and fulminations, which put an importance on councils, better reſerved for the ſimpler purpoſes of ſpreading the ſincere milk of the word.

Though ARIUS was not yet ariſen, the ſhades of hereſy, from deiſm, though all the gradations of Semiarians, Arians, down to ſocinianiſm, were now ſown and vegetating. There is nothing new under the ſun. Every modern heretic may find a precedent in antiquity. When men become wiſe above what is written, the ſacred mound of truth is broken down, and the waters of error deluge the world.

In this age alſo aroſe the wild hereſy of the *Manichæans*, which ſpread with ſuch rapidity through the Chriſtian world. It came from the Eaſt, and was an attempt to unite the doctrines of the magi with Chriſtianity, as the ſchool of Alexandria, with Origen at its head, deſired to ingraft Chriſtianity on platoniſm.

The

The doctrines of Manes contained a tiſſue of abſurdities too long and too uſeleſs to be repeated, reſpecting *two originally exiſting principles of good and evil*; and his rule of life was the moſt auſtere imaginable. Every inſtinct of nature muſt be ſuppreſſed, and every paſſion extirpated. The body being ſuppoſed intrinſically evil, and eſſentially corrupt, was to be denied every object that could adminiſter convenience or delight.

An. 251. One hereſy more, if a hereſy it be deemed, ſprung up, of a very ſingular nature. Novatian with the moſt zealous attachment to the Chriſtian orthodox doctrine and duties, by the ſeverity of his diſcipline became obnoxious. The Church had only excluded from communion forever ſuch as *relapſed*. He refuſed all communion with ſuch as had *once* apoſtatized in the hour of perſecution, or fallen into ſuch offences, as were diſgraceful to their profeſſion. He did not indeed deny the poſſibility of repentance and ſalvation for ſuch perſons; but condemned all who received them again into communion; and inſiſted on re-baptiſing ſuch, as from other Chriſtian ſocieties having countenanced ſuch admiſſion of the lapſed, wiſhed to join the body of thoſe, who from the ſtrictneſs of their diſcipline were called the *cathari*, or pure. I ſhall by no means juſtify a practice, I think not countenanced by Scripture, but I can make many

allowances for the neceſſity of peculiar care, when the immenſe number of the falſe and unfaithful, ſo highly diſgraced the Chriſtian name; and probably favour and connivance re-admitted multitudes into the communion of the Church, whoſe conduct and character demanded more watchful attention. I admire the fidelity of Cyprian, in oppoſing the letters of reconciliation, too eaſily obtained from the martyrs, and requiring that ſome ſolid evidence ſhould be given of their real ſorrow and converſion, before the lapſed ſhould be re-admitted to the ſociety of the faithful.

CHAP. III.

OF THE PRINCIPAL PERSONAGES WHO FLOURISHED IN THE THIRD CENTURY.

ORIGEN.

Born 185—Died about 252.

NEVER perhaps exiſted a character of a caſt ſo uncommon, as that of Origen. In piety fervent, in zeal diſtinguiſhed, from his earlieſt years a Chriſtian; his morals unimpeachable; an eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's ſake literally; and ſealing the truth of a confeſſor with the ſufferings, if not the death of a martyr. Indefatigable in labour, endued with ſingular genius, improved by immenſe erudition, and admired by his cotemporaries as the paragon of ſcience and learning; yet withal debaſing the doctrines of Chriſtianity with the moſt abſurd interpretations, and ſubjecting them to the dogmas of the platonic philoſophy, as if this was the divine key to unlock theſe treaſures of wiſdom. He ſuppoſed *the outward letter* of Scripture, to be of no ſpiritual benefit; but as it led to the hidden meaning, and the *whole of revelation to be of little uſe to thoſe who ſhould underſtand*

it only according to the literal ſenſe. He taught with his maſter Plato, that the human ſoul was an emanation of the Divine nature; comprehending in it all the principles and elements of truth, human and divine: and theſe ſouls pre-exiſting, and ſubject to tranſmigration. The mode in which he ſpoke of the incarnation of the Son of God opened a wide door for the admiſſion of the Arian hereſy. His high opinion of the powers of the human intellect, and the freedom of the human will, ſuperſeded all ſupernatural influence from the Holy Ghoſt as unneceſſary: and his ſuppoſition of the ſouls ſuffering in other bodies, deſtroyed the idea of eternal puniſhment as the wages of ſin, and left the hope of final reſtoration to purity and perfection, to ſet all right at the laſt.—Errors of the moſt fearful and fatal kind, and ſubverſive of every vital principle of Chriſtianity.

His auſterities and manners, were as far from Chriſtian excellence, as his doctrines were from truth and ſimplicity. To diſarm concupiſcence he ſubmitted to the moſt painful operation, and to ſubdue every bodily craving, he exerciſed the ſevereſt rigour of mortification; familiar with cold, nakedneſs, and poverty, barefooted, abſtaining from wine, and every indulgence; frequent in vigils and faſting, he macerated the body, in order to make a readier courſe for the ſhining of *the inward light,* and

and the acceſs of divine truth. This remarkable ſeverity of manners, contributed greatly to enhance his character for ſanctity, as the depths of his philoſophic reſearches exalted his reputation for wiſdom: Thus he opened the road to all the gloomy diſcipline and follies of monkery: which the ſpirit of ſelf-righteouſneſs afterwards begat on pride, and ſelf-ſufficiency: and produced the ſpawn of hermits and ſolitaries, that peopled the deſerts and monaſteries, with the uſeleſs crew of celibataries.

The ſchool of Alexandria was the chief ſcene of his labours. He was heard as the oracle of ſcience, honoured by all the philoſophical ſects; and his name in high celebrity among heathens, as well as Chriſtians. Nor did the violence committed upon himſelf prevent his being ordained a preſbyter in the church of Alexandria. From thence he travelled to Athens, every where diſſeminating his platonic Chriſtianity, and generally admired and revered; attacking every hereſy, with the artillery of his profound erudition, and it is ſaid vanquiſhing with his victorious ſyllogiſms, Beryllus, biſhop of Boſtria in Arabia, and other heretical teachers, and reclaiming them to the Church; though the victor and the vanquiſhed with ſuch weapons, alike afford miſerable ſpecimens of evangelical truth. Indeed even then many of ſounder principles diſputed his platonic dogmas as heretical; and his

own dioceſan of Alexandria, in two councils depoſed and degraded him from the prieſthood, for falſe doctrine. It muſt be acknowledged that his philoſophical Chriſtianity, and platonic theology, had a grievous diſſimilitude with the ſimplicity which is in Chriſt, and ſeemed the very reverſe of Paul's determination to know nothing elſe but Jeſus Chriſt and him crucified, and not to preach with the enticing words of man's wiſdom, but with thoſe which the Holy Ghoſt teacheth.

By his own account the ſtate of vital Chriſtianity was become very low indeed, and the careleſs behaviour of Chriſtians truly afflictive. "They "come to Church," ſaith he, in one of his homilies, "not for inſtruction but diverſion: Some "go out as ſoon as the lecture is ended, neither "conferring with, nor aſking of their paſtor any "queſtions, and others ſtay not even till the lec-"ture is finiſhed: whilſt ſome pay no attention "to the diſcourſe, but entertain themſelves toge-"ther in a corner of the church." So that we ſee the former days were too like our own. Indeed, if the lecture contained nothing but the faſhionable, philoſophical, allegorical and myſtical interpretations of the platonic ſchool, it could claim little attention; and it is to be feared, that under ſuch tuition the ſimplicity of truth muſt be loſt, and its vital ſpirit evaporated. Such modes of interpreting

terpreting the Scriptures muſt have been as unprofitable and abſurd, as the unſcriptural rules of life, held in high eſtimation, and recommended as attainments of ſuperior excellence, tended to corrupt the practice of true Chriſtianity.

Greatly therefore as Origen was venerated in his day; eminent for ability, and activity, and cloſing a long life of profeſſion, with a readineſs to ſuffer every torment for the religion he maintained, his Chriſtianity appears awfully equivocal. No man contributed more to corrupt the ſimplicity of Goſpel truth, and grace; no man opened a wider door to the wildeſt ſyſtems of errors, and doctrines of demons; no man's teaching and example more powerfully paved the way for all monaſtic follies and abuſes: and if an impartial examination is made of the good or evil ariſing to Chriſtianity by his labours, and they are weighed in the ſcale of evangelical truth, the latter will, I am ſure, be found to preponderate in an amazing proportion, and leave very meagre features of a Chriſtian man, or a Chriſtian divine. How much wood, hay and ſtubble, may be built on the foundation, with real gold and ſilver, and precious ſtones, the day of fire muſt decide. We ſhall not, through mercy, be each other's judges: but when we are writing impartial hiſtory, we are bound to ſpeak the truth from the heart, as far as our beſt knowledge reaches.

I confeſs my views of Origen, with all his greatneſs and univerſal admiration, leave me very much in doubt of *his* real Chriſtianity, and induce me to entertain a much worſe opinion of the Chriſtian world in that day, which could raiſe ſuch a man on the pedeſtal of eminence, and hear his rhapſodies with ſuch profound veneration. I wiſh I could give a more favourable ſuffrage. There is a Judge who will do right.

CYPRIAN.

Elected Biſhop	-	An. 248
Martyred	- -	258

A far nobler, and leſs equivocal perſonage riſes into view, the juſtly honoured and faithful Cyprian; whoſe character Mr. Milner has held up to light in the moſt glowing tints of admiration and reſpect. In many things he is worthy, and merits all the praiſe he receives. But Cyprian was a man, compaſſed about, like his fellows, with infirmity. In his office, manifeſting the pride of a too unhumbled heart: in his epiſtles, mixing ſentiments highly exceptionable, with obſervations wiſe and judicious: and in his viſions and miraculous pretenſions, far from deſerving unlimited credit. Impartiality requires me to note with utter diſapprobation, aſſertions ſo unſcriptural as the following: "There is only one epiſcopacy, ſuch as are

"out

"out of this church have no ſalvation to hope "for."—"A man may be killed, (for the confeſ- "ſion of Chriſt,) but not be crowned (as a martyr) "unleſs actually in the church,"—meaning that to which Cyprian belonged.—"No baptiſm is va- "lid, nor any ordination valid out of this church, "or by any perſon deemed heretical, though ad- "miniſtered in the name of the Father, Son, and "Holy Ghoſt."—"Baptiſm in the church always "procures remiſſion of ſins."—"Calamities are "to be wiſhed for, as they enable us to merit the "rewards of heaven." It would be tedious to produce other paſſages equally ſhocking. And far, very far, am I from believing thoſe pretenſions of Cyprian, to which Mr. Milner and many Papiſts give implicit credit; ſuch as—"Healing the ſick "—extinguiſhing the force of poiſon—compelling "unclean and wandering ſpirits, by menaces, to "quit their hold of men—ſcourging and controul- "ing the foe of mankind—and bringing him to "confeſs what he is in torments." I am, I own, little ſatisfied with the teſtimony of the fathers of that age. They appear highly ſuperſtitious and credulous. The ſtories of miracles innumerable related by them, carry on the face of them, ſtrong grounds for heſitation. The more I compare them with the Scripture miracles, the leſs am I diſpoſed to credit them. Nor were the miracle-mongers themſelves the kind of men in whom I could ex-

pect

pect ſuch powers would reſide. Premiſing theſe things, I proceed—

Cyprian was by birth a man of family. His fortune was conſiderable, and his proſpects in the world promiſing. He was bred to the bar; had a literary education; was an admired orator, and though ſomething too rhetorical, not an inelegant writer. His genius was vivid, and his erudition reſpectable. When he became a Chriſtian, he readily ſacrificed all that he might win Chriſt. His ſubſtance he diſtributed to the poor, and his talents he devoted to the Church, of which he became a biſhop about two years after his converſion: elected, ſays Pontius Diaconus, his biographer, *plebis favore*, by the favour of the people,* when quite a Neophite. He was alſo a married man, that being as yet no bar to the epiſcopal office.

During the perſecution of Decius, Cyprian lay concealed; the ravages it occaſioned were great, but the apoſtacy greater. The picture which Cyp-

* The power of the people in every church, notwithſtanding all prelatical encroachments hitherto, was very great, as Cyprian himſelf fully acknowledges, Epiſt. 68. ipſâ plebs *maxime* habet poteſtatem eligendi dignos ſacerdotes, vel indignos recuſandi. The body of the people have principally the authority to elect worthy miniſters of the church, or to reject ſuch as they judge undeſerving.

rian

rian draws of the ſtate of Chriſtianity, preceding this perſecution, unleſs very highly changed, exhibits a fearful picture of biſhops, preſbyters, and people; we might juſtly ſurmiſe, more modern times had ſat for the portrait. The profeſſors loſt in worldly-mindedneſs and gain; luxury and effeminacy in dreſs and manners generally prevalent; profaneneſs without a check; and marriage with infidels common. Quarrels and diſputes the moſt outrageous riſe, with all the acrimony of abuſe and malignity. Even biſhops, not only negligent of their flocks, but utterly deſerting them, for pleaſure or gain; covetous, fraudulent, uſurious. Thus the declenſion, which had long before commenced in the days of peace and proſperity, advanced with haſty ſtrides, and now called aloud for the ſword of a Decius, and the diſcipline of a Cyprian, to rouſe the latent ſpark of fidelity and zeal, and to reſtore the decays of preceding generations. Though the conflict ſeems much leſs fierce in Africa than in many other places; and Cyprian ſays, deſerves the name of trial, rather than perſecution: yet on the firſt ſound of the edicts of this bloody Emperor, before the magiſtrate ſat, or the informer produced an accuſation, crowds of nominal Chriſtians ran to exculpate themſelves, and to offer the preſcribed ſacrifices; too numerous to be all admitted to the proof, they regreted the delay of another day to brand

brand themſelves apoſtate. Grief and ſhame blot the record with tears.

At firſt Cyprian continued openly to ſupport his own church; and wrote conſolatory and exhortative letters to the ſuffering brethren at Rome; but the perſecution raging, the madneſs of the Pagan populace demanded him for the lions, and he withdrew, according to the Divine command, from the ſcene of blood.

His retreat, however, prevented not his anxious cares for his own and other ſuffering churches. Many of his beautiful letters were written during his concealment; and the epiſtle ſent from Rome in anſwer to his own, breathes a truly divine unction, and informs us, that though ſome of the great, and even paſtors apoſtatized, yet a noble body of confeſſors ſtood firm againſt the ſtorm, and held their faith and a good conſcience amidſt all the ſufferings of torture, impriſonment, and death itſelf. Nor was their tenderneſs and compaſſion for the lapſed a leſs amiable feature, than their labour and deſire for their recovery.

His letter to the church of Carthage, beſpeaks a wiſe and experienced Chriſtian. He guards the confeſſors againſt *ſpiritual pride*; and to thoſe who know

know the human heart, and the deceitfulneſs of ſin, no unneceſſary caution; warns them againſt fleſhly luſts, which war againſt the ſoul: and mentions the evil conduct and fornication, into which ſome, who had confeſſed Chriſt in the face of torments and death itſelf, had notwithſtanding afterwards fallen.

His epiſcopal ideas appear too elevated; yet he diſclaims doing any thing without the conſent of the whole body of preſbyters and people: for, hitherto this right had been preſerved, if not inviolate, at leaſt acknowledged. His other letters breathe the ſame ſpirit of parental care and watchfulneſs, and only loſe much of their weight and excellence by the viſions he records, which, however they might affect his own congregation, ſtrike us probably in a very different light. It will give no weight or dignity to a truly great character, to be a viſionary.

What cannot corruption abuſe? Even the martyrs too haſtily granted letters of conciliation to the lapſed; and the Church, without conſulting their biſhop, received them to communion. This Cyprian highly reſents; and confeſſes his triumph in the ſufferings of the martyrs, was damped by the diſorderly conduct of the confeſſors who had eſcaped. Had this been the only inſtance of prelatical

latical uſurpation, I ſhould with Milner join in the condemnation of Moſheim. Every church ought to maintain diſcipline; and Cyprian, I preſume, claimed no more in this reſpect, than his predeceſſors had exerciſed. And ſurely, it was highly for the good of the whole, that ſome mark of humiliation ſhould reſt upon thoſe who had ſo ſhamefully denied the Lord of glory. The power aſſumed by martyrs and confeſſors, appears highly blameable. Pride is the native inmate of every boſom; even martyrs may feel its workings. It is well for them as for us, that there is one, who bears the iniquity of our holy things. The blood of atonement need be ſprinkled on the expiring corpſe of the martyr in flames; but for this *he* would periſh, and *they* would be eternal.

An. 250. A ſchiſm in the church of Carthage, produced by the election of another biſhop, Fortunatus; and the ill behaviour of Novatus and Feliciſſimus, might juſtly have grieved a man of lowlier ſpirit, and leſs elevated ſentiments of his own epiſcopal dignity than Cyprian. But a diviſion of a ſimilar kind in the Church of Rome, occaſioned the African biſhop a ſeries of ſtill greater troubles and diſputes.

The Church of Rome had been deſtitute of a biſhop for upwards of a year, and as the perſecution

tion raged there with peculiar violence, it could not fail to expoſe the paſtor, whoever he might be, to ſevere and immediate conflicts. This for a while ſuſpended a new election to the ſee. In the mean time, *Novatian* a Roman preſbyter, grew high in the eſteem of many of his brethren and the confeſſors; but admitting into his friendſhip Novatus, who had quarrelled with Cyprian, and retired from Carthage to Rome, it is ſaid, that at the inſtigation of his friend, he ſeparated from the Church: to this I cannot give haſty credit, any more than to Cyprian's abuſe of Novatus, as a turbulent, ambitious, and immoral character. That *Novatian* was a man of moſt exemplary piety, and in diſcipline peculiarly rigid, is admitted. He differed from his friend *Novatus* reſpecting the lapſed, and judged them for ever inadmiſſible into the Church whatever ſigns of repentance they might have given. It is very improbable that ſuch a perſon, would have embraced as a brother, one whoſe conduct had been juſtly cenſurable, much more if openly notorious.

Though the ſeverity of Novatian's diſcipline might be blameable, yet in his deſire to make apoſtacy more fearful, a good man might err, even in the exceſs of his jealouſy, for the honour of religion. Many of the Romiſh clergy, eſpecially the confeſſors, united with him in ſentiment. This greatly

greatly divided the Romiſh preſbyters, ſome holding the more lenient doctrine of reſtoration; Novatian with his aſſociates the more rigid ſentence of final excluſion. The two parties, therefore, each choſe a biſhop. Cornelius of the party oppoſite to Novatian, is ſaid to be ordained by *ſixteen* biſhops then at Rome. How ſixteen biſhops, in the height of ſuch a bloody perſecution ſhould be there aſſembled for that purpoſe, appears not a little ſurpriſing, unleſs the name of biſhop and preſbyter being ſtill ſynonimous, as I ſuſpect, theſe Roman preſbyters or biſhops, might chooſe a ſucceſſor to the ſee, and the people approve: for I have not yet obſerved an inſtance of foreign biſhops preſuming to intrude a paſtor upon another church, and if they did, this had been a juſt cauſe for the very diviſion which enſued. Novatian, and the preſbyters attached to him, not approving the ordination of Cornelius, they placed Novatian over them, it is ſaid, in a very irregular manner. But that does not appear. Euſebius is a miſerable voucher, and evidently himſelf, in this affair, miſtakes Novatus, for Novatian.

I am the longer on this point, becauſe Mr. Milner calls theſe the firſt *diſſenters* from the Church, not a tittle of which I can perceive; for *Novatian* was a biſhop as truly choſen and ordained, from any thing which appears, as *Cornelius*. He was a man

man avowedly ſound in all the principles of the Goſpel doctrine, and concurring in all the diſcipline of the Church; nay, diſpoſed to carry it to exceſs; and beſides this, there reſts not a ſhadow of accuſation againſt him. As it is impoſſible to judge of all the grounds of quarrels even among good men now, when we are ſo much nearer the ſcene of action, greater muſt be the difficulty to decide for times ſo diſtant, and where we have ſuch partial materials; probably, as is the caſe in moſt diſputes, there was too much of pride and ſelf-will on both ſides, and more yielding, and leſs obſtinacy would have better become Chriſtian biſhops. The party of Cornelius prevailed. Cyprian ſtrongly eſpouſed it. Nicoſtratus, a friend of Novatian at Rome, came into Africa, and was ordained a biſhop there over thoſe who now bore the names of Novatians, from the Roman biſhop. He is charged with ſcandalous crimes; but the accuſations of enemies are to be received with caution; and a body diſtinguiſhed by the name of *cathari*, or *pure*, and whoſe diſcipline was allowedly more rigid than that of other churches, would hardly have appointed a man of ſcandalous manners for their head. I can mark no ground of declenſion herein with Mr. Milner. Had there been no other proof than what is called *the Novatian hereſy*, or *ſchiſm*, I ſhould have been rather ſtruck

with the ſeverity of the diſcipline maintained in the Church, than with any decline of zeal and purity. For the other churches, from whom in this alone the Novatians differed, were even abundantly ſtrict, as appears from Cyprian himſelf.

Cyprian being returned to the care of the church of Carthage, immediately aſſembled his brother biſhops to heal the breaches which had been made. The diſpute between Cornelius and Novatian came before them. Cyprian was the enemy of Novatian, both in reſpect to the treatment of the lapſed, and becauſe he eſpouſed Novatus, who had preferred Fortunatus to Cyprian at Carthage. The letters of Cornelius were received; the charges againſt Novatian admitted; and his condemnation pronounced. From the very letter of Cornelius itſelf, I am ſtrongly perſuaded of the falſehoods laid to the charge of Novatian; and if the invalidity of his ordination turned upon his being conſecrated, as it is affirmed, "*by perſons in a ſtate of intoxication*," I aſk no more than the whole tenor and purity of Novatian's conduct, to confute ſuch an accuſation. Bad as matters were grown, the biſhop of the Cathari, for the credit of his ſect, as well as his own, would ſurely never have expoſed himſelf to a cenſure of this kind. The very ſuggeſtion gives me a lower opinion of Cornelius.

Novatian

Novatian and Fortunatus were both condemned by this epiſcopal ſynod, and Cyprian triumphed over his rival and ruled in Africa. The Novatians however continued long a body of profeſſing Chriſtians, and I have always been led to ſuſpect, true members of the Church of Chriſt, and perhaps, the cloſeſt walkers with God.

Cyprian now evidently the firſt biſhop in the Church, for high reſpect and elevation, informs Cornelius what they had done, and how they had cut off from *the Mother Church* all who preſumed to refuſe ſubmiſſion to their dominion; and to break that unity which they thought fit to preſcribe. The inſolence, the abuſe, and the condemnation heaped on the devoted heads of all that preſumed to differ from a biſhop of Carthage, Mr. Milner may excuſe, vindicate; I utterly condemn it, fully perſuaded, that the peace, the unity, and purity of the *true Church*, will be a thouſand times better preſerved, by leaving our brethren who may differ from us to themſelves, bearing and forbearing, than by all the anathemas hurled againſt them by a Cyprian, a Gregory, or a Laud.

The weight of Cyprian, and the increaſing party of Cornelius, tended greatly to weaken the diviſion under Novatian. A letter from the Romiſh Church informed him of the victory they had

gained; and contains their ſolemn avowal, "that "but one biſhop ought to be in the Catholic "Church, as there is but one Holy Ghoſt;" an expreſſion, to my ears, full of blaſphemy; perſuaded that the Holy Ghoſt dwelt in the churches of Philippi and Galatia, with many biſhops in each, in as abundant a meaſure as in Cornelius or Cyprian; and I rather think in a greater: but the ſtrong lines of Popery, and a viſible head of the Catholic Church, whoſe anathemas were to hurl into the duſt every oppoſer to prelatical pride, had now begun to make conſiderable ſtrides; and no man hitherto had more contributed to this than Cyprian. Being a man of birth, opulence, diſtinction, able, zealous, really uſeful in ſpreading and maintaining the purity of the faith, he roſe high on the ſtilts of epiſcopal dignity; ſwayed Africa by his influence; and all the Chriſtian world acknowledged his greatneſs. He muſt be a man indeed of ſingular grace, who, in ſuch a ſituation, did not feel himſelf important, and take too much upon him.

The reply of Cornelius to the biſhop of Carthage, breathes an acrimony, an inſolence and abuſe, that ſpeaks as little in favour of the man who could *receive* it with complacence, as of him who could *indite* it in the bitterneſs of his heart; and they muſt be ſad Chriſtians indeed, whoſe ſtate I ſhould not

not prefer to the biſhop, who could write theſe letters. We have only an account of the Novatians from their enemies, but that is ſufficient to demonſtrate, however much *they* were in the wrong, that the ſpirit of Chriſtianity had little to boaſt of in their perſecutors.

The diſpute about the lapſed afforded many a cauſe for epiſtolary correſpondence: and Cyprian's plan is aſſuredly the moſt ſcriptural. But when he writes to Cornelius, as Milner owns, there is much more of the hero than of the ſaint, fighting for epiſcopal dignity, and treating all his own and Cornelius's adverſaries, with ſuch ſupercilious contempt, bitter enmity, and inſolent arrogance, as muſt exceedingly degrade a Chriſtian man, much more a Chriſtian biſhop. On this head, inſtead of the meekneſs and patience of Jeſus Chriſt, he diſplays a ſpirit ſo different from what breathes in his general character, that I can only grieve, for what I dare not but condemn. How far the abuſe and ſeverity with which the Novatians were treated widened the breach, the leaſt reflection and knowledge of the human heart muſt ſuggeſt: and Mr. Milner allows with every good man, that, "in a defection from Chriſ-"tian purity of doctrine, and where the heads of "the Church are in principle and practice *ungodly*, "we may juſtly ſuſpect the Lord hath forſaken

"theſe, and that his Spirit would reſt on thoſe who "ſeparated from them." Such ſuſpicion, no doubt Novatian and his brethren entertained, however miſtaken they might be: and the uncharitableneſs with which they were treated, would have no tendency to heal their ſuſpicions.

NOVATIAN by his revilers is admitted to be a man of genius, learning, and eloquence. His moral character was unimpeachable. It required ſingular excellence to maintain himſelf and his congregation, againſt the weight of power and influence which were againſt him. One of the beſt, cleareſt, and moſt preciſe treatiſes which antiquity can produce, on the triune God, comes from his pen. He ſtates diſtinctly, that, "the Holy Ghoſt "is the author of regeneration—the pledge of the "promiſed inheritance—the hand-writing of eter-"nal ſalvation—who makes us the temple of God, "and his abode—who intercedes for us with groan-"ings which cannot be uttered—our advocate and "defender—dwelling in us—and ſanctifying us for "immortality," &c. When I hear Cyprian anathematizing ſuch a man, I can only ſay, I would rather be under the curſes with Novatian, than utter them with Cyprian. I forbear to quote the high expreſſions, to me bordering on impiety, with which he honours the epiſcopal order, and from whence he

he derives the claims of obedience; this ſeems the great blot in his eſcutcheon, and the cauſe of all the indefenſible ſeverity with which he treated thoſe who preſumed to differ from him. His noble career, after a life of unwearied labour,
AN. 258 terminated, as became him, in a death of martyrdom under Valerian. In the ſame perſecution, his antagoniſt, ſhall I ſay, his enemy, Novatian (but a Chriſtian ſhould have no enmities) cloſed his noble efforts alſo, with a like glorious end; and ſhewed, with many of his followers, that however they might differ with their brethren in leſſer matters, they could as faithfully die for Chriſt, and claim the crown of martyrdom. Ah! that great men, good men, confeſſors, martyrs, ſhould ever quarrel, and not be willing to bear and forbear! If one is our maſter, even Chriſt, to him let us be content to be reſponſible; follow the beſt dictates of our conſcience according to our views of God's word; and be happy to indulge our brethren with the ſame liberty. The preſervation of the unity of an *outward church*, in the eyes of a ſpiritually minded man muſt be contemptible, compared with the holding the unity of the ſpirit in the bond of peace, and loving one another out of a pure heart fervently. Cyprian and Novatian at the right hand of the great Shepherd and Biſhop of ſouls, muſt be aſhamed of their harſh ſpirit, and

their harſh ſpeeches. It is a mercy for us all, that we have ſuch a compaſſionate high-prieſt, who knows how to pity our infirmities, and to pardon our iniquities.

As I have dwelt ſo long on a character, which then engaged the firſt attention, I ſhall only juſt mention two perſons highly, I will not add deſervedly, revered, Gregory Thaumaturgus, biſhop of Neoceſaria, and Firmilian, biſhop of Cappadocia, the pupils of the famous Origen, and deeply tinctured with all the eclectic philoſophy. The creed, which the latter miraculouſly received, from John the Evangeliſt, and the Virgin Mary, ranks with the viſions of Cyprian. And as to the abundance of miraculous gifts of Thaumaturgus, I muſt have better evidence, than Gregory of Nyſſen and Baſil, a hundred years after, ere I can receive them. The one ſentence before quoted from Gregory, diminiſhes grievouſly his Chriſtian character, and weighs againſt a multitude of traditionary reports, at ſuch a diſtance from the date of the facts; and without a living witneſs, or a ſingle authentic and credible teſtimony at the time. That theſe men were acute and able diſputants, and followed up the ſocinian, Paul of Samoſata, through all his windings of ambiguity and dexterous evaſion, I can ſuppoſe. This triumph they ſhall be allowed, and I will not impeach

impeach the juſtice of his depoſition. But I am utterly diſſatisfied with the proof Mr. Milner brings of the abundance of Gregory's miraculous powers, and believe juſt as much of them, as of much better ones, related in Mr. Weſley's journals. Good men may be tinctured with credulity, and really be deceived themſelves, before they attempt to deceive others. I ſee no danger the truth of Chriſtianity can receive from ſuſpending our belief of Gregory's miracles; I ſee a great door opened for fraud and ſuperſtition in the admiſſion of them.

I muſt paſs over more ſlightly a numerous hoſt who ſhone in that firmament, as ſtars of leſſer magnitude; yet, perhaps, in ſpirit and temper more like their Lord, than the greater, and more diſtinguiſhed polemics. Hippolitus, Julius Africanus, Dionyſius of Alexandria, Methodius, Minutius Felix, Arnobius, all have left us writings; and are delivered down to us, as the ſucceſsful defenders of the Chriſtian cauſe. Indeed it was now univerſally prevalent; but as we have ſeen, by awful experience, the profeſſors were more than the poſſeſſors, though they alſo were a great hoſt, as the hoſt of God.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

FORM OF GOVERNMENT, RITES, AND CEREMONIES.

THE government of the ſeveral churches, in an enlarged circle, was now conſolidated under one head, with magiſterial authority. The biſhop, however, ſtill conſulted his preſbyters, and the congregation of the faithful in matters of moment, relative to his church; ſuch as the diſtribution of the offerings; the ordination of miniſters, the excluſion of members from, and their admiſſion to the Lord's table. One biſhop alſo had great pre-eminence over his fellows; ſummoned councils; preſided at their deliberations; and uſually ſwayed their opinions. Such was Cyprian in Africa. Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, claimed a ſort of pre-eminence, for their antiquity, and on difficult matters were conſulted: though the bounds of metropolitan, or epiſcopal authority fluctuated, according to the ability, reputation or ambition of the perſon who filled the ſee. The biſhop of the great metropolis began to claim, and was generally now admitted to hold a certain priority of dignity above his *fellows*; for equality reſpecting *order* and office

was

was yet jealouſly maintained by the epiſcopal band. And therefore, when Stephen, biſhop of Rome, iſſued his mandate, reſpecting the baptiſm of heretics, Cyprian rebuked his inſolence, with equal indignation and contempt: but, whilſt the biſhops watched with jealouſy the ambitious encroachments of their companions in office, each endeavoured to extend his claims ſucceſsfully in his own church; and was ſupported by the ſpirit of the corps in his pretenſions. They aſſumed every day more of abſolute rule in their own ſees, trenching upon the rights of the preſbyters, and excluding the interference of the faithful. Theſe were now taught implicit obedience, and heard the conſtant warnings of the deadly crime of reſiſting epiſcopal authority, ſeated upon the throne of God, and claiming divine right and ſubmiſſion. The evils neceſſarily reſulting from ſuch a ſpirit, and ſuch abuſes, muſt be incalculable; and appeared in the pride, pomp, luxury and carnality of many of theſe prelatical dignitaries. The other orders endeavoured to imitate them in lording it over their inferiors; and claiming their ſuperior honours of ſacerdotal reverence. Even the deacons uſurped many of the preſbyters' offices, and, in the uſeleſs and multiplied rites and ceremonies inſtituted in the Church, appointed beneath them a herd of inferior orders, ſub-deacons, acolyths, door-keepers, readers, exorciſts, buriers of the dead, which ſtrengthened the clerical

clerical army with their ſubordinate functions; and were ſuppoſed to ſhare a minor portion of their ſanctity.

Though marriage was ſtill generally uſed, a ſtate of celibacy continued to acquire a degree of reputation; and monkery, the offſpring of the platonic philoſophy, and promoted by the great oracle Origen, expanded its roots, and peopled the deſerts, far from the haunts of men.

The ſacraments alſo, inſtead of ſimple memorials, and outward ſigns of inward and ſpiritual grace, began to be ſuppoſed to have divine grace neceſſarily attached to them, and to acquire a value which they had not before attained, becoming ſo indiſpenſibly neceſſary to ſalvation, that even to infants the communion ſhould be adminiſtered. There does not yet appear any diſpute *whether* the children of Chriſtians ſhould be baptized, but *at what time*, and if, like the rite of circumciſion, it ſhould be adminiſtered on the eighth day. This momentous queſtion employed the wiſdom of Cyprian and ſixty-ſix biſhops to decide. His reaſonings on the efficacy of baptiſm are as unſcriptural, as the diſputes about the re-baptiſing heretics were frivolous: as Cyprian inſiſted on this point, the war was carried on with ſcandalous aſperity; and he was ſolemnly excommunicated by

by the biſhop of Rome. In times of declenſion, trifles become important, and the *mode* of, and *time* for baptiſm, the ſign of the croſs, and the proper day for obſervance of Eaſter were matters as violently conteſted, as if the foundations of all truth and godlineſs were about to be razed. Ah! when will good men learn to leave modes and forms in their proper place; to give ſecondary matters leſs of their polemics; and reſerve the weight of their arguments and zeal for the great eſſential truths and the real converſion of the heart to God!

Long ſermons, full of trope, figure and allegory, with an affectation of Grecian eloquence, were introduced by the ſchool of Origen, and tended greatly to debaſe the ſimplicity of Chriſtian truth. Incenſe now firſt ſmoked, on what began to be called the altar. The ſacrament of the Lord's Supper was celebrated with greater pomp and ſolemnity. Gold and ſilver veſſels were uſed in the ſervice, with garments for beauty and glory: ſuppoſing theſe would command greater reverence and reſpect for the ſacred myſteries. They began alſo to ſpeak of the elements after conſecration in a language which laid the foundation for the groſs and impious doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, and by degrees proceeded, though after a courſe of ages, from veneration to adoration, and from high myſti-

cal

cal flights, to ſuggeſt a *real* body of Chriſt, in the euchariſt.

Before admiſſion to *baptiſm*, the exorciſt with frightful menaces and formidable ſhouts, pretended to expel the prince of darkneſs from the candidate. The remiſſion of ſins was thought to be the immediate effect of baptiſm, rightly adminiſtered by the biſhop or his delegate. By his ſubſequent prayer and impoſition of hands, (for his preſence on thoſe occaſions was always neceſſary,) the Holy Ghoſt was ſuppoſed to be given. Theſe baptiſmal ſolemnities were reſerved for the great feſtival of Eaſter, and the forty days ſucceeding. A ſolemn parade and proceſſion of the exorciſed, and baptiſed, in white garments and crowns, in token of their victory over the devil, cloſed the auguſt ceremonial. Every ſtep we advance, betrays the growing declenſion, and the loſs of true Chriſtianity, in forms and ceremonies, and the tricks of jugglers, to give importance to a new-invented prieſthood.

Faſting alſo grew into high eſtimation. The platonic doctrine of demons generally taught and believed, introduced all the abſurdities of ſpells and exorciſms; and as bodily macerations were ſuppoſed of peculiar efficacy, and the demons leſs troubleſome to thoſe who were lean and hungry, than

than to ſuch as had a belly full, all were put under diſcipline; and the degree of ſanctity increaſed in proportion to the rigour of the faſt and the mortifications impoſed on the body. Days of faſting were enjoined by biſhops and councils, and multiplied; and ſharp and bitter contentions followed, whether it ſhould be on the ſixth or ſeventh day of the week. Such aſtoniſhing puerilities could engage the attention of the moſt exalted characters! and in aid of other mighty weapons againſt the powers of darkneſs, the ſign of the croſs began very generally to prevail, and Chriſtians undertook nothing of moment without this important precaution.

Prayers were univerſally offered thrice a-day, according to the cuſtom of the Jews, as well as at other times, occaſionally by the faithful; and juſtly reckoned among the moſt important duties. On feſtivals, the general mode was *to ſtand*; on days of faſting and humiliation *to fall on their knees*, or *proſtrate* on the ground. Forms of prayer began to be introduced, but no ritual generally eſtabliſhed. Every man was yet at liberty to expreſs the ſenſations of his mind in free and unreſtrained effuſions, and to ſpeak out of the abundance of the heart.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

ON THE TRUE SPIRITUAL CHURCH.

STRONG as the flames of perſecution burned around the Church and its martyrs, and ſhed a glory on the noble army of confeſſors, anguiſh of heart traces the growing corruptions, which in every interval of peace and quiet prevailed. Truth compels me to relate what I find recorded in the writers of that day; yet, though the rubbiſh now began to diſfigure the ſanctuary, there appears in numberleſs inſtances a genuine ſpirit of zeal for Chriſt, and fidelity to his ſervice.

The doctrines, which are according to godlineſs, may be found in the greater number of the writings of that age; and the zeal to ſuppreſs hereſy appears in the multiplied treatiſes on that ſubject. But I dare not enter upon theſe. The reaſonings they contain are ſo often fallacious, and inconcluſive; the ſophiſtry ſo apparent, and the conteſt rather for victory than truth, that the diſpute is very unprofitable; and this alſo managed with ſuch aſperity and invective, that I rather quit the arena

arena to the eccleſiaſtical combatants, and their intereſted diſciples, and retire to ſeek the faithful, not ſo much among the more diſtinguiſhed characters, as with the ſimple followers of the crucified Lord; who leſs noticed for dignity, learning, and worldly reſpect, lifted up to him in their inferior ſtations, holy hands, without wrath or doubting.

With all the mixtures of what was evidently wrong, the body of the Church held faſt the head Chriſt. Cyprian, with all his inexcuſable loftineſs and aſperity, diſplays the moſt ſolid piety and judicious obſervations. His labours muſt have been greatly bleſſed; the revival of Chriſtianity from the low condition in which he found it, ſo as to be able to aſſemble ſixty-ſix neighbouring biſhops around him, beſpeaks a very flouriſhing eſtate of the African church. And when we ſee his own ſufferings, and thoſe of a multitude of others, we cannot but highly venerate the men who dared thus to count their lives not dear unto themſelves. I can have no doubt that many of theſe African biſhops were men of true primitive ſimplicity of manners, and devotedneſs to God our Saviour. Their dioceſes could be but of ſmall extent, and their care of the flock was exemplary. Aſſuredly, in many of them, whoſe names are not come down on the regiſter of reputation, the true Church of

Chriſt ſubſiſted in its vigour; and among them might perhaps be leſs incredulous, if I could fi the atteſtation of miraculous powers, than in th who affected them. A great hoſt of living w neſſes was found of thoſe who knew the power Chriſt's reſurrection and the fellowſhip of his ſ ſufferings. Nor can I confine the *Church* to the p of thoſe who appropriated to themſelves the ti of *Catholic*. I have no doubt that the Novati were a bleſſed company of faithful people, and ſtrictneſs of life and manners equal at leaſt thoſe who excommunicated them; and amo the other ſects, with all the miſtakes into wh ſophiſtry or education might have led many, th were ſtill ſome who held the Lord Chriſt; w ſhipped him in ſpirit and in truth; and died, we are aſſured, as readily for their confeſſion him, as they had lived in holy obedience to hi

The unhappy idea of *the unity of the Chu under a particular mode of government*, inſtead unity of ſpirit, meekneſs, and mutual forbearan in matters uneſſential to ſalvation, whilſt all p feſſed to hold the faith once delivered to the ſai produced the plenteous tares of controverſy, the abhorred mutual excommunications of m whoſe duty was to love one another out of a p heart fervently; but whoſe corruptions too o prevailed about trifles over the ſpirit of cha

and of a ſound mind. Yet multitudes, below controverſy, and removed to the obſcurer ſcenes of life, incapable of judging of all the learned nonſenſe, and unaffected with the aſperities of the diſputes, quietly purſued their way to heaven and glory, through ſanctification of the ſpirit unto obedience, and the ſprinkling of the blood of Jeſus Chriſt.

Let it be mentioned, ere I conclude, to the honour of many, that they ſpared no expence or trouble, to obtain multiplied copies of the word of God: a work then of no ſmall difficulty, and a treaſure of the value of which we are incompetent judges, who, ſince the art of printing has been invented, can ſo eaſily, and for a trifle procure, what was then ſo hard to obtain.

Thus have we approached the cloſe of the third important century. Many woes are paſt, and one yet to come, under the Pagan Roman Emperors, to ſeparate the chaff from the wheat: and chaff in abundance was now found in God's threſhing-floor. A long ſcene of comparative eaſe, and proſperity—the unchriſtian diſputes which prevailed—the growing importance of clerical men—as if the Church conſiſted of a peculiar tribe—the vaſt prevalence of the profeſſion of Chriſtianity—

the eaſier admiſſion than formerly within the pale —and the declenſion both in conduct and care, evident in the complaints of the cenſurers of thoſe times—for, as Milner obſerves, ambition and covetouſneſs had now pretty generally the aſcendancy in the Chriſtian nominal Church—All theſe, and many other evidences, beſpoke a very declining ſtate of ſpiritual religion, and demonſtrated of the many called, then, as now, how few were really choſen. When church rulers appear more anxious to eſtabliſh their own weight and authority, than to promote the power of godlineſs; and exhauſt their zeal in frivolous diſputes and haughty anathemas, inſtead of mildneſs, and with compaſſion, bearing the infirmities of the weak, and charitably yielding in matters not eſſential to ſalvation, the Church muſt ſuffer in its beſt intereſts.

But notwithſtanding all offences, Chriſtianity was now riſing to univerſal empire. The ſyſtem, both in its principles and practice, was ſo ſuperior to paganiſm: and after the ſchool of Alexandria aroſe to meet the philoſophic ſects, with weapons drawn from their own armoury, the folly and falſehood of the eſtabliſhed ſuperſtitions were completely demonſtrated, and contempt poured on the rabble of pagan deities, the objects of popular devotion. Chriſtianity alſo, in the garb of platoniſm, loſt

loſt many of its moſt revolting features in the eyes of the rationaliſts, and they more eaſily abandoned a religion, which before they did not themſelves believe; and gods, whoſe conduct muſt excite horror and diſguſt, inſtead of adoration. Thus, without ever taſting the grace of God in truth, multitudes even of the wiſer heathens and philoſophers, became converts to the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, and ſwelled the number of deſerters from paganiſm. In vain Celſus, Porphyry, Lucian, whetted their weapons of argument or ridicule; the more the matter became the ſubject of examination, the more the Chriſtian apologiſts triumphed; and numbers of the learned, and ſuperior caſts, as they are eſteemed in the world, joined the banner of the croſs: but theſe were far from the ornaments or living ſtones in the ſpiritual temple. The Church, nominally, was always as at preſent, a mixed multitude. Of the wiſe, the mighty, the noble, however numerous the profeſſors of Chriſt, few were ever found really faithful. The gate of heaven is too ſtrait, and the road too narrow for them to enter.

Chriſtians now were not debarred from honours and offices: the Emperor's court was filled with them: the army compoſed of Chriſtian profeſſors, both officers and ſoldiers; and many held high

civil employments. The churches, no longer able to contain the crowds of worſhippers, were enlarged and multiplied. The Pagan altars were abandoned to the prieſts that attended them; and trembling, expected the ſtroke of their final demolition. The living few rejoiced to ſee the caſting down of ſatan's empire in the idolatrous world, whilſt they lamented the prevailing abominations among thoſe who bore the Chriſtian name; and the pride, worldlineſs, ſelf-indulgence, contentions, careleſs walking, and loſs of vital godlineſs, too ſtrongly marked in the prieſthood, as well as people. We ſhould greatly err, if we thought the former days were better than our own. I believe with ſome fluctuations, great declenſions and alternate revivals, Chriſtianity ſubſiſts now, as in the days of the Apoſtles. The glory of the Lord then evidently appeared—it ſpread to the ends of the earth. The truth, as it is in Jeſus, hath ever ſince had its confeſſors, and often its martyrs; but oftener thoſe, who had only a name to live and are dead. Numbers enliſted in the ranks, who never proved themſelves faithful ſervants of the great Captain of Salvation, by manfully fighting under his banner, againſt ſin, the world and the devil. Then, as now, the many endeavoured to reconcile the incompatible ſervices of both worlds; and in that caſe it will be no longer doubtful

doubtful which of the two maſters, God or Mammon, will prevail. But there was, and ever will be, a remnant according to the election of grace, againſt whom the gates of hell, with all its fury, ſhall never prevail; and whom falſe ſcience and philoſophy ſhall never deceive nor pervert, from the ſimplicity which is in Chriſt.

SECT. V.

TO THE ACCESSION OF CONSTANTINE.

CENT. IV. PART I.

CHAP. I.

DIOCLESIAN'S PERSECUTION.

THE morning of the fourth century opened with a gleam of ſun-ſhine, and Diocleſian's peaceful protection promiſed a continuance of the Church's halcyon days. A few drops had fallen in the laſt years of the preceding century, which threatened a ſtorm; but it had blown over. The death of Marcellus, whether conſidered, as Gibbon repreſents it, a puniſhment for an act of military diſobedience; or rather, proceeding, as it appears, from his Chriſtian fidelity, in not ſubmitting to ſome heathen rites, contrary to his conſcience, had not been attended with any general perſecution. It was in the commencement of the fourth century, that the volcano

volcano which had long emitted only ſmoke, or a paſſing flame, burſt again the mountain with redoubled violence, and the burning lava ſpread deſolation on every ſide.

An. 285—293. The Roman Empire was now under the dominion of four; for Diocleſian had aſſociated Maximian to ſhare with him the cares of government, and by each of theſe a ſucceſſor had been choſen; Galerius by Diocleſian, and Conſtantius Chlorus by Maximian. Theſe four had divided the empire between them. Diocleſian and Galerius occupied the Eaſt, and Africa. Maximian and Conſtantius the Weſt. Gaul and Britain fell to the care of the latter. Diocleſian himſelf had been long indifferent to all religions, though naturally ſuperſtitious, and profeſſing paganiſm. Maximian was a brute in nature. Chlorus was a man of candour; and though no Chriſtian, not a polytheiſt. He kept his portion of the empire undiſturbed. But Galerius foſtered a rooted enmity to Chriſtianity, and breathed nothing but fury and ſlaughter againſt all the men of that way. It is ſuppoſed his mother, a bigotted Pagan, and governed by her prieſts, had inſtilled into him an inveterate hatred againſt the Chriſtian name. Coming to paſs the winter with his adopted father at Nicomedia, he uſed all his influence with the aged Emperor, himſelf a dupe to ſuperſtition, and now more

more than ever influenced by the Pagan prieſts, to extirpate, if poſſible, the Chriſtians root and branch, and to revive the expiring glory of paganiſm: but the wiſe and more crafty Diocleſian, ſenſible of the immenſity of thoſe who muſt be devoted to deſtruction, reluctantly yielded to the meaſures of violence, and preferred the more cautious ſteps of ſuppreſſing their aſſemblies, and intimidating their leaders.

Galerius hoped, if the work of perſecution were but once ſeriouſly commenced, the current would ſoon run with violence irreſiſtible. He ſpent the winter at Nicomedia with Diocleſian, in planning the execution of his diabolical deſign. The great church of Nicomedia was the firſt object of vengeance, as a prelude to the razing all the reſt. The firſt edict enjoined the ſuppreſſion of Chriſtian worſhip, and the ſeizure and delivery of all their ſacred books, in order to commit them to the flames. Many eluded the edict, and concealed the ſacred treaſures, whilſt ſome, biſhops and preſbyters, to avoid the threatened ruin, gave up their holy Scriptures, and were branded by the zealous, as *traditores*, or traitors. AN. 803.

The church at Nicomedia being levelled to the ground, and other ſacred edifices ſharing the ſame fate,

ſtate, a ſecond edict iſſued, depriving every Chriſtian of all preferment, honour, or dignity in the ſtate or army. Men might have an appeal to the laws againſt *them*, whilſt they were excluded from their protection, and expoſed to every inſult with impunity. A daring diſciple, whoſe zeal prompted him to pull down the unjuſt decree, was ſeized and burnt alive.

As the meaſures yet adopted were not fully correſpondent to the ſanguinary ſpirit of Galerius, he cauſed, as Lactantius aſſerts, the palace of Diocleſian to be ſet on fire, and then accuſed the Chriſtians, as having done it in revenge; and with a malicious deſign to deſtroy both the Emperors. The too credulous Diocleſian became inſuriate at the accuſation, and Nicomedia flowed with the blood of martyrs, as incendiaries. Diocleſian's wife and daughter ſuſpected of favouring Chriſtianity, were compelled to ſacrifice: the eunuchs of his court, and the officers of the army were the firſt victims. The biſhops and principal preſbyters were ſeized, and conveyed to priſon; and another edict compelled them by every torture, to ſacrifice to the gods; hoping their example would effectually influence their flocks. Some purchaſed their lives by baſe compliance; but many endured all the ſeverity of torture, and death itſelf, rather than

than deny their Lord: more were buried alive in the mines, to expire in hard labour, bondage, and poverty.

But the fidelity of the martyrs and confeſſors being unconquerable, their ſufferings rather confirmed the faithful, and confounded, probably converted, many of their enemies. A fourth edict therefore came forth at the inſtigation of Galerius, commanding the magiſtrates without diſtinction of age, ſex, or ſtation, to torture even to death; to uſe every wile or cruelty to make the Chriſtians apoſtatize, and to ſlay the obſtinate. Nor could any thing ſhort of that almighty arm which can ſupport the feeble, and ſubdue the proudeſt, have prevented the utter ſubverſion of the Chriſtian Church.

It would be endleſs to particularize the ſufferings of multitudes, recorded by the martyrologiſts, who braved every torment, which the moſt diabolical malice, and inſenſate cruelty could invent. Humanity recoils at the recital of ſuch atrocities, and turns away afflicted from the groans of the tortured, and the convulſions of the dying. Promiſcuous ſlaughter of all ranks and ages dyed the fields with blood—an entire city was given up to flames and the ſword—and where policy ſhocked at its own devaſtation, wiſhed to ſpare uſeful ſubjects,

jects, maimed and lacerated, they were condemned to ſlavery; to dig in the mines; or periſh with the ſeverity of labour. Sacrifice or ſuffer, was the only alternative. Inſtigated by the orders of the inhuman tyrants, as well as goaded by the prieſthood around them, the magiſtrates with zeal vied with each other in the execution of every brutal edict; and throughout the Eaſtern empire, and part of the Weſt, the name of Chriſt was menaced, to be had no more in remembrance. But amidſt a too fearful apoſtacy of many, Chriſt was to others dearer than life and all its comforts, and choſen as a portion, in the face of death, and all its terrors. A noble army of martyrs peopled the manſions of glory provided for them, and from their blood ſprang up a numerous hoſt of confeſſors, ready to ſtep into the ranks, under the great Captain of Salvation, and dare to die.

I am ſurpriſed, that with the evidence which remains, men of credit, who boaſt the ſincerity of hiſtoric truth, can wiſh to ſuppreſs, or ſo unfairly miſrepreſent, facts, that meet us throughout the vaſt extent of all the empire, and prove in the multitude of the ſufferers, the conſtancy of the ſaints; but ſome men hate the light, and feel an implacable enmity againſt the crucified Galilean: yet conquer he muſt.

An. 305. Galerius, ambitious as cruel, had now perfected his ſcheme to ſeize the empire from his aſſociates. Diocleſian, and Maximian, he compelled to reſign their dignity, waiting for the entire dominion, on the death of Chlorus, whoſe ill ſtate of health ſoon promiſed his rival that gratification. Mean time he aſſociated to himſelf in the cares of empire, Maximin his ſiſter's ſon.

Conſtantius Chlorus drawing near his end in Britain, ſolicited Galerius to ſend him his ſon Conſtantine, who was kept as an hoſtage at court. The requeſt was refuſed by the crafty Emperor, and Conſtantine, ſenſible of the danger of his ſituation, determined to attempt his eſcape. Accordingly he ſeized a moment of opportunity, and to prevent purſuit, is ſaid to have killed all the poſt horſes on his rout. His arrival at York was but juſt announced, when the dying Conſtantius expired, and the army without waiting to conſult Galerius, immediately pronounced Conſtantine Emperor of the Weſt in the room of his father. Thus in the very moment, when the light of Iſrael was threatened with extinction, had God provided a protector for his afflicted Church. An. 306.

Galerius heard with indignation an event ſo contrary to his ambitious deſigns, and compelled to ſuppreſs

ſuppreſs for a while the vengeance he meditated, he reluctantly confirmed the purple to *him*, whom he hoped ſoon to ſtrip of this imperial ornament.

Meantime a ſpirit of diviſion was ſown among the wicked. Galerius and Maxentius, who had ſucceeded Maximian in Italy, quarrelled. Thus weakened, Conſtantine firſt attacked Maxentius, defeated him; and ſeized Rome, the capital, of the world. Whilſt Galerius, ſtruck by the hand of the great avenger, periſhed by a lingering diſeaſe, tormenting as the pangs he had made the Chriſtians feel, but deſtitute of their ſupports. AN. 312.

CONSTANTINE, who, with his father, had ever favoured the Chriſtians, now openly appeared their protector. And as Galerius had before his death, whether from policy to conciliate the Chriſtians to his government, or from the horrors of a guilty and tormenting conſcience, ſuſpended all the edicts, and reſtored freedom of worſhip, and repoſe to the diſciples of Jeſus, the world at laſt ſaw the arm of cruelty broken, and the banners of the croſs erected in peace. Maximin, the ſucceſſor of Galerius, who made a feeble effort to renew the ſcenes of blood, and with a craft perhaps yet more dangerous than violence, ſought to deſtroy the child Jeſus and his cauſe; himſelf arreſted in his career, ſoon fell by the

the ſword of his collegue, Licinius. And he ſhortly after yielded the purple to the all-conquering genius of Conſtantine: who thus became the undiſturbed poſſeſſor of the entire Roman empire, both Eaſt and Weſt. So did the Lord, after ages of ſharp perſecution, preſerve his Church and people, amidſt the fires that had been kindled around them; and with his own right hand and his mighty arm, got to himſelf the victory: and thus doth the God of providence and grace ſtill direct and over-rule all events; and the hearts of men; ſo as ultimately to accompliſh his own eternal purpoſes. Nor is it leſs a mark of his univerſal dominion, that the inſtruments employed, were often very far from ſharing themſelves the real benefits of that Chriſtianity, which they were the means of eſtabliſhing. AN. 313—323.

CHAP. II.

CONSTANTINE.

CONSTANTINE, the firſt Roman Emperor, who profeſſed Chriſtianity, is uſually among many other diſtinguiſhed characters, ſirnamed the GREAT. A nobler appellation, would have been the GOOD, but he merited it not. Human admiration attaches itſelf to outward diſtinctions, and the title *great*, as far as my obſervation reaches, uſually marks the moſt deſtructive, the moſt tyrannical, and the moſt murderous of mankind; and I am ſorry to ſay, I can ſee no more of true Chriſtianity in Conſtantine, than in Henry the VIIIth: and am as little ſatisfied either with the principles or fidelity of his hiſtorian Euſebius, who blazons his fame with the ſtrongeſt colouring. Whatever obligations the Church has to *him*, as great probably had he to the *Chriſtians*; and policy, as likely as conviction, directed his conduct. I wiſh I could ſay otherwiſe; as it is, I muſt ſpeak the truth as it appears. The cauſe of God will never ſuffer by the unworthineſs of thoſe, who have eſpouſed it upon principles very different from the purity of the Goſpel.

Conſtantius,

Conſtantius, his father, had no doubt communicated to him his own views. He deſpiſed the gods of heatheniſm. Diſpoſed to tolerate all religions, under the influence of ſceptical principles, he could not but obſerve the excellence and fidelity of the Chriſtian character; and therefore, like many others, though no Chriſtian himſelf, he preferred them in his houſehold, court, and army; where they enjoyed protection, and prayed for the proſperity of their humane ſovereign. The vaſt increaſe of Chriſtians alſo, could not but make it a conſiderable object among thoſe who were contending for empire, to ſecure ſuch a body in their intereſt, by toleration, rather than to exaſperate them by perſecution: and to this we ſee the moſt bitter and malicious driven, in the laſt decrees of Galerius and Maximin.

The empire to which Conſtantine was advanced, demanded from him, as much as poſſible, to ſtrengthen himſelf, and weaken his enemies; and therefore his intereſt herein concurred with his inclinations, to favour the long perſecuted, but wide ſpreading profeſſors of the Chriſtian name. I can ſee no evidence that Conſtantine was at all a Chriſtian, at his acceſſion to the empire. It rather appears, even after his victory over Maxentius, that he conſidered all religions as alike, and uſeful to mankind; and though he tolerated Chriſtianity,

and admitted its public worſhip, he left all parties the ſame liberty, and attached himſelf as yet, deciſively to neither.

I am ſorry to differ from ſuch excellence, as I reſpect in Chriſtian hiſtorians, but I have received no conviction from any thing I have yet read, reſpecting the miracle of the croſs in the ſky, and the viſion of Chriſt to Conſtantine, the ſubſequent night; any more than of the thundering legion of Adrian. I will not ſay it was impoſſible; nor deny that the Lord might manifeſt himſelf to him in this extraordinary way; but the evidence is far from being concluſive, and I can hardly conceive a man of his character would be thus ſingularly favoured. That ſuch a report might have a great effect upon the Chriſtian ſoldiers in both armies, I can well conceive, and tend powerfully to ſecure the object he had in view. A dream he might have had, and have mentioned it: and his banner conduce to the victory which he gained. Had the fact been as reported, ten thouſand witneſſes of his army would have rendered his own oath to Euſebius unneceſſary. Did Euſebius himſelf doubt? or was ſuch a teſtimony needful, to eſtabliſh a report, ſo well known, if founded in truth? Or did Euſebius think it for the honour of Chriſtianity, and preſs this as a miracle into the ſervice? Hiſtorians of as good credit as Euſebius, Rufinus, and Sozomen,

men, ſeem to queſtion the fact, by not reporting it. And were it a reality, Conſtantine muſt have been ſtill more criminal, to ſin againſt ſuch conviction, and take no decided part with the profeſſors of the religion of Jeſus, and not immediately join in their worſhip and aſſemblies. Nothing of which appears till long after.

Become the conqueror of Maxentius, and as it ſeems chiefly by the ſupport of Chriſtians; his favour to them increaſed, in great munificence to build them churches, and in abounding liberality to their poor. Their biſhops were honoured by him and careſſed; and their ſynods held and ſupported by his authority. Licinius had taken a contrary party. As his rival Conſtantine openly protected and cheriſhed the Chriſtians; he perſecuted and oppreſſed them. He courted the prieſts of the antient ſuperſtition, and endeavoured to ſtrengthen his authority by the ſupport of his pagan ſubjects. The matter thus was at iſſue; the croſs prevailed, and paganiſm fell with Licinius.

Having now no longer a competitor, Conſtantine reſolved to take the moſt decided part with the Chriſtians. He prohibited the heathen ſacrifices, and ſhut up the temples, or converted them to the purpoſes of Chriſtian worſhip. He univer-

ſally eſtabliſhed Chriſtianity, and tolerated no other religion openly throughout the bounds of his empire. The juſtice of which I doubt, and even the policy. I ſee no right to compel even an idolater, contrary to his conſcience.

That Conſtantine might be ſincere in his preference of Chriſtianity to all other religions, there is little reaſon to diſpute; nor does it much ſignify, whether he was ſincere or a hypocrite in his profeſſion, if his heart was not right with God, and he never walked ſteadfaſtly in his covenant. That ſuch was his ſtate, appears upon the cleareſt and moſt deciſive evidence. He waded to empire through ſeas of blood; his neareſt relatives were ſacrificed to his ambition. Nothing in his whole life diſcovers a trace of real converſion to God; and his latter days were the moſt oppreſſive and tyrannical of his government. The deferring his baptiſm might be excuſed by the ſuperſtition of the times, though that is an awful excuſe. But the whole tenor of his life, except favouring biſhops, building churches, enriching them with wealth and finery, and other very equivocal marks of Chriſtianity, diſplays no trait of a Chriſtian character, or a Chriſtian hero. His very choice of ſuch a man as Euſebius, of Ceſarea, for his ſpiritual director, is a miſerable proof of any Chriſtian diſcernment,

cernment, or ſcriptural views of God our Saviour: and his baptiſm, by ſo heterodox a biſhop as that of Nicomedia, a few days before his death, leaves as dark a cloud upon his latter end, as on his beginning.

The bounties he beſtowed; the zeal he diſplayed; his liberal patronage of epiſcopal men; the pomp he introduced into worſhip; and the power inveſted with general councils; made the Church appear great and ſplendid; but I diſcern not a trace in Conſtantine, of the religion of the Son of God. As an outward profeſſor, and for an outward Church, no man more open, more zealous: as a partaker of the grace of God in truth, either in genuine repentance for his crimes, or real newneſs of life, I want abundantly better evidence, than I can ſee in Euſebius; who like many a courtly biſhop, is very cordially diſpoſed to exalt on a pedeſtal, the King that patronizes and encreaſes their power, wealth, and dignity.

I believe Conſtantine choſe to die in the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, as the true religion; and from ſome of its doctrines, ill underſtood, expected to be ſaved at laſt by the water of baptiſm: to which ignorance and ſuperſtition had now pretty fully annexed the remiſſion of ſins. As the Popiſh viaticum at laſt clears all ſcores, and ſends men

off with extreme unction ſafe to St. Peter; but every one who has truly learned Chriſt, ſees nothing in all this the leaſt concluſive of a real Chriſtian, or that Conſtantine died other than he had lived. It may be admitted, that he was a formal religioniſt, a nominal believer in revelation; a zealous friend to the Church; and flattered by Euſebius and his fellows with the hope of heaven, through the water of baptiſm; but not a trait appears that his heart was divinely converted, or the ſpirit of his mind renewed by the power of the Holy Ghoſt.

I am as perſuaded that his eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity, and of thoſe biſhops, whom, particularly at laſt, he moſt eſpouſed and favoured, contributed beyond any thing to the awful debaſement and declenſion of true religion: and from him and his ſon Conſtantius, evangelical truth ſuffered in the ſpirit of the Chriſtian profeſſors, as much as their perſons had undergone from Dioclefian or Galerius.

To thoſe who look to the flouriſhing ſtate of the Church, in exaltation, honour, and general eſtabliſhment, Conſtantine may appear a Chriſtian hero; a great Emperor, a nurſing father: to thoſe who look to the man, they will ſee at beſt a very dubious character, whoſe morals were a diſgrace to

to the profeſſion of Chriſtianity; and whoſe principles, if he ever had any, were thoſe of education; and ſo far as Euſebius was his ſpiritual guide, grievouſly ſuſpicious. Even admitting his acknowledgement of the doctrines and forms of worſhip ſincere, it is impoſſible not to ſee, that his choice was politically wiſe, and that the intereſt of the Chriſtian party contributed to ſeat him on the empire of the world. I would rather have been the meaneſt Chriſtian in a cottage, than Conſtantine THE GREAT.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

THE PREVAILING HERESIES.

NOVATIANISM ſtill maintained its ground, and, as far as I can ſee, with exemplary purity of doctrine and conduct. The riſing pompous Church began to eclipſe all who baſked not in the ſunſhine of imperial favour; probably theſe fell into contempt and oblivion, few, and of no reputation; and riſing to no height of epiſcopal dignity or eminence, they were ſuffered quietly to walk with God, and to be bleſſed, unnoticed, and unknown. But another ſchiſm, as more novel, excited more attention in the famous church of Carthage. On account of the election of a biſhop to that ſee, a diſſatisfaction, from whatever cauſe, prevailed; and the oppoſite party, under the patronage of a wealthy lady, named Lucilla, and ſupported by Donatus, with whom a multitude of African biſhops concurred, in a great council depoſed Cæcilian, and placed Majorinus, a friend of Donatus, in the ſee of Carthage. Which of the contending parties was right or wrong it would be difficult to determine: probably both were equally blameable,

blameable, and were more ſwayed by pride and paſſion, than by the ſpirit of peace and purity. Donatus and his party, however, had no favour at court, which, in my view of them, does not convey any diſgrace. The Emperor, on the conteſt being brought before him, condemned the Donatiſts, and confiſcated their churches. Had the deciſion turned againſt Cæcilian, he would have been the diſſenter. However, after various acts of perſecution and baniſhment, the Emperor indulged the Donatiſts with toleration, of which, Mr. Milner ſays, they made an unworthy uſe. I heſitate always to believe the report of enemies. The Donatiſts might be wrong, but men, who to follow the dictates of conſcience, refuſe to travel in the road of honour and emoluments, have in the ſcale of Chriſtianity ſome preſumptive evidences in their favour. AN. 314.

AN. 316. MELETIUS, an Egyptian biſhop, depoſed by Peter of Alexandria, formed a ſeparate body of Chriſtians, who bore his name; not accuſed of having corrupted the Chriſtian doctrine, or diſcipline; and only, as it ſeems, differing from Alexander, the ſucceeding patriarch, who was too rigid in the point of heretical baptiſm; in which Meletius was in ſentiment with the orthodox church. Theſe epiſcopal ſquabbles, for ſuperiority and dominion, were equally the diſgrace of all who

who were concerned in them. Can we permit no man to differ from us, or chuſe his own mode of worſhip, without excommunications and anathemas? They make the hereſies and ſchiſm, who with weapons, not of our warfare, thus fight with their brethren. The true Church, in ſpirit and in life, will often be found, I am perſuaded, among the excommunicated, and thoſe branded as ſchiſmatical.

An. 320. A fouler plague, and of more fatal conſequence, by the extent and continuance of the contagion, burſt forth from Arius, a preſbyter of the church of Alexandria. A man of ſcience, grave deportment, irreproachable manners, and an acute diſputant. He was of the ſchool of Origen, the prolific father of hereſy, the offspring of falſe philoſophy and human reaſonings. The famous Euſebius had trod in the ſame crooked path, and his platonic ſyſtem had begun to degrade the Son, from *co-equality*, whilſt he ſeemed to admit *co-eternity* with the Father. Arius advanced with a larger ſtride, aſſerting, that before he was begotten, he had *no exiſtence*; that he *had a beginning*, and was created from *non-exiſtence*. Yet Arius uſed ſuch ambiguous and high-ſounding titles of veneration, adoration, and deity, as to caſt a miſt over the degrading debaſement, with which he wiſhed to invelope our great God and Saviour,

Jeſus

Jeſus Chriſt. Proud reaſoners from that day to this, from Origen to Dr. Prieſtley, have moved downwards through all the gradations and ſhades of diſtinction, between *eſſential deity*, and the *mere man* Chriſt Jeſus: but the difference is vaſtly leſs important than it appears. The infinite diſtance between *ſelf-exiſtent*, and *created* godhead, renders every ſubſequent gradation from a nominal god, to no god at all, inconſiderable. The firſt ſtep is the eſſential hereſy. Dr. Clarke is as much a blaſphemer as Socinus. As none can adequately know the things of God, but the Spirit of God, we diſplay as much our pride as our folly, when we preſume to comprehend fully either the nature of God, or the mode of his exiſtence. The imbecillity of the human intellect reaches not theſe deep things of God: and whoever, vainly puffed up of his fleſhly mind, ſuppoſes the exertions of his natural reaſon fully equal to the perfect comprehenſion of all revealed truth, will ever grope for the wall as blind: and alienated from the life of God, the deep corruption, and the deſperate wickedneſs of his heart, muſt alike prevent him from ſubmitting to the righteouſneſs of God, for juſtification to life, deceived by an imaginary power of human ability to walk and to pleaſe God. From all ſuch, the great lines of incarnate Deity, his atonement and grace cannot but be hidden, and muſt be rejected as ſuperfluous.

The

The opinions of Arius were too congenial with the pride of human wiſdom not to find multitudes of defenders. Diſputes enlarged the number among the wiſe and philoſophic; who, eager to diſtinguiſh their acuteneſs, by definitions, and by attempts to make that clear and conſiſtent with a ſuppoſed reaſon, which muſt be incomprehenſible, becauſe above it, ſpread the Arian hereſy, for which the platonic philoſophy had prepared, and deluged the Chriſtian world with this fatal error.

Expelled from the Church, by Peter, biſhop of Alexandria; but reſtored by his ſucceſſor Achillas, Arius ſo well ſtrengthened his party, that Alexander, the ſucceſſor of Achillas in that ſee, timid, candid, or cautious, hardly dared call the matter into diſcuſſion; till the ſpread of theſe heretical opinions compelled him to ſummon a council at Alexandria, where Arius was excommunicated with many of his adherents. But the wiſdom of man reluctantly bows down to the revelation of God; and all the philoſophic ſchool of rational Chriſtianity eſpouſed the cauſe of the Hereſiarch, and widened the breach, with the bitterneſs and contention natural to thoſe, who having loſt the power of godlineſs, were ſtruggling for ſuperiority; and, indeed, in many inſtances, it muſt be owned, the reputed orthodox were as far from the line of Chriſtian truth and conduct, as their Arian oppoſers.

AN. 325. It was thought worthy the great Conſtantine himſelf to preſide in the deciſion of this controverſy at Nicomedia. All attempts of the Emperor to heal the breach had been abortive, and applications to Alexander and Arius, by Hoſius the good biſhop of Corduba, were alike ineffectual. The general aſſembly therefore of epiſcopacy met in all the pomp of magnificence, with the Emperor at their head; and after diſputes the moſt violent; mutual accuſations the moſt abuſive; and all the weapons of controverſial ſophiſtry exhauſted; the Arian hereſy was condemned; the creed drawn up by Hoſius of Corduba, ſince called the Nicene, adopted; and baniſhment enacted againſt all who ſhould refuſe to ſubſcribe the decree.

I ſhall not enter into particulars, by no means creditable to councils; nor enquire into the proper mode of maintaining orthodoxy: yet I cannot but expreſs my wiſh, that meekneſs and forbearance had prevailed over anathemas; for, as to the ſuppreſſion of hereſy by theſe, experience has fully taught how impotent is the effort.

ARIUS was depoſed, excommunicated, and forbidden to enter Alexandria. His party, to ſave their biſhopricks, were all, except two, engaged to ſubſcribe to what they did not believe; and the breach, inſtead of being healed, was made wider than

than ever, in the diſputes and contentions diſſeminated by this means over all the Chriſtian world. The change of a ſingle letter ομοιουσιος, for ομουσιος left the vanquiſhed party a loop-hole to creep out. So every one who ſubſcribed retained his own ſenſe: the conſtant effect of all forcible ſubſcriptions, where any thing is to be loſt, or any thing to be got.

The Nicene canons give us a very mean opinion of ſo many grave fathers wiſely diſputing, when Eaſter ſhould be kept—whether a clergyman might imitate Origen's example and literal ſenſe of Scripture regarding eunuchs—whether they ought to cohabit with their wives—whether a biſhop can quit his church for a richer—how long the lapſed ſhould be ſuſpended—and the like important ſubjects.

A worldly church, and an outward uniformity, being the object purſued by Conſtantine, it is no marvel, that a perſon acting on no ſettled principle ſhould veer about. After the death of his mother Helena, his ſiſter Conſtantia gaining great influence over him; Arius and his party, whom ſhe befriended, had their condemnation reverſed: and though the Nicene creed continued unrepealed, Athanaſius, who had ſucceeded Alexander at Alexandria, and the orthodox Trinitarians, found the courtly party with

with the Emperor at their back, ſtrong enough to counteract all that had been decided, and to turn the tables of perſecution on the orthodox. Theſe reſolutely perſiſted in refuſing to receive to their communion the men, who affecting to ſubſcribe the articles eſtabliſhed, continued utterly to reject the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. AN. 326.

It would lead me too far to recount the ſtand made by Athanaſius; and all the wiles and court intereſt to ruin his reputation; and ſilence his oppoſition; but in vain. They could expel him from his ſee, but he returned triumphant to the charge, the unſhaken champion, for many years, of what is yet held as the ſcriptural doctrine of the Trinity by the orthodox.

The groſs frauds, and impoſitions attempted, and often with ſucceſs, againſt Athanaſius, ſhew the ſhockingly debaſed ſtate of the Chriſtian hierarchy, to which, under the Emperor, all theſe accuſations were referred. The depoſition of Athanaſius at the Synod of Tyre, was the triumph of Arianiſm. Euſebius, Biſhop of Nicomedia, who, Mr. Milner ſays, "ſtuck at no fraud, and was "aſhamed of no villainy," had the Emperor's ear, and Athanaſius was baniſhed into Germany. AN. 335.

The activity of Arius, who now returned in triumph to Alexandria, embroiled Egypt in the moſt furious contentions; and fear of conſequences probably compelled the Emperor to ſummons him to court; where the ſame ſpirit produced the ſame effects; and Conſtantinople became the ſcene of the moſt unchriſtian conteſts. Alexander the biſhop, refuſed to receive Arius into communion, though, in compliance with the Emperor's order, he had ſubſcribed the Nicene creed; and confirmed it by an oath, under an evaſion, if Sozomen is to be credited, the moſt ſhocking. Certain it is he was not believed by the orthodox. It is ſaid, that Alexander, biſhop of Conſtantinople, ordered by the Emperor to receive him to the Lord's table, with faſting and prayer invoked God, either that he might himſelf die before the day appointed, *if Arius was in the right*; or that he would cut off Arius, and ſave him from what he counted ſuch a diſgrace as communicating with him. On the very day of deciſion, Arius died in a very extraordinary manner.

How difficultly can I believe a word of this? What! A man of Alexander's ſpirit, ſaid to be, *the neareſt to primitive Chriſtianity*, ſpend a night in faſting and prayer, to know from God, *if Arius was in the right?* What an idea! to beg his own death in that caſe? What authority warrants ſuch a wiſh?

a wiſh? To pray for the death of Arius, if miſtaken? What ſort of primitive Chriſtianity muſt this man's be? For his credit and the honour of orthodox truth, I demur to the report.

That the death of Arius, in ſuch a caſe, and after ſuch a night of faſting and prayer, muſt appear ſuſpicious is no wonder: and I muſt believe, if the matter be rightly repreſented, it would injure, much more than ſerve, the cauſe of orthodoxy. It gives us on both ſides an awful ſpectacle of the kind of ſpirit which prevailed in the Emperor, his courtiers, the orthodox patriarch, and the hereſiarch Arius. The Church of Chriſt has ſmall pretenſions to ſpirituality amidſt ſuch combatants. I confeſs, I know not where to give credit. Deeds are done on both ſides ſo contrary to every principle of love and the ſpirit of meekneſs and truth, that I ſtand like a man in court, between two witneſſes, ſwearing to contradictions.

Never did a more fatal hereſy than Arianiſm deſolate the Church of Chriſt, more extenſive in its ſpread, and more abiding in its continuance; and it is rife to this day. But though I believe a man cannot be ſaved in a fundamental error, reſpecting the divinity of our Lord, that he ſhould be perſecuted or puniſhed for his opinions, has no Scrip-

ture precedent; ſince miracles, at leaſt, and immediate intimations from God have ceaſed. Exclude from the ſociety of the faithful, thoſe who refuſe to worſhip the ſame true God: this is ſcriptural. But let no bitterneſs, nor wrath, nor anger, nor malice, diſhonour the diſcipline; much leſs any injury to the perſon, fame, or circumſtances of the heretical, gratify human paſſions. The judgment of the Church is monitory, there is one who will pronounce the final ſentence.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

THE CHURCH, ITS GOVERNMENT, RULERS, RITES AND CEREMONIES.

THE Church, now in the eſteem of ſome, was exalted to the higheſt pinnacle of proſperity, inveſted with vaſt authority; and the epiſcopal order collected in ſynods, and councils, with almoſt ſovereign dominion. The churches vied in magnificence with palaces; and the robes, and pomp of ſervice, imitating imperial ſplendor, eclipſed paganiſm itſelf, with mitres, tiaras, tapers, croſiers, and proceſſions. If outward appearances could form a *glorious* Church, here ſhe could preſent herſelf: but theſe meretricious ornaments concealed beneath them, all the ſpirit of the world; pride, luxury, covetouſneſs, contention, malignity, and every evil word and work. Hereſy and ſchiſm abounded, and wickedneſs of every kind, like a flood, deluged the Chriſtian world: whilſt the heads of the Church more engaged in controverſy, and a thouſand times more jealous about ſecuring and encreaſing their own wealth and pre-eminence, than preſenting examples of humility, patience, deadneſs to the world, and heavenly mindedneſs, were, like gladia-

tors armed in all their councils, and affected imperial power and pomp in the greater dioceſes.

By degrees the people became degraded into annihilation; their voice neither aſked, nor their conſent deemed any longer neceſſary; even the preſbyters bowed to ſovereign epiſcopal ſway, and miniſterial court appointments. The prelatical government became modelled after the imperial, into great prefectures: of which, Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Conſtantinople, claimed ſuperiority; whilſt a ſort of feudality was eſtabliſhed, deſcending from patriarchs, to metropolitans, archbiſhops, biſhops, ſome with greater, and others with leſs extenſive ſpheres of dominion. Thus each was ſeen graſping at more than belonged to them; contentious to enlarge their own reſpective privileges and immunities; yet, cordially conſpiring to erect the moſt deſpotic pretenſions of epiſcopal authority over all the Chriſtian world beſide, and aſſuming to themſelves all church powers, as they claimed all its emoluments; and to become lords of the inheritance, inſtead of examples to the flock.

Among theſe the *Biſhop of Rome* held a moſt diſtinguiſhed place. Conſtantinople, however, began to eclipſe the ancient ſeat of empire; and her biſhop to claim a *ſupremacy*; always diſputed, and terminating at laſt in the ſchiſm of the Greek and Latin

Latin Churches. General opinion ſeems to have been in favour of the ancient capital. The ſplendor of her biſhop; his ſumptuous manner of living, riches, revenues, pomp of worſhip; and a multitude of clerical offices, attracted eſpecial notice. Hence the elevation to that ſee became a principal object of ſacerdotal ambition; and occaſioned conteſts and tumults, as dreadful to the public peace, as contrary to every idea of Chriſtian charity and humility. Yet though claiming ſome privileges above his fellows, the Biſhop of Rome had as yet pretended to no direct dominion over his brethren, who were ſuppoſed to hold by the ſame divine right as himſelf; and though often appealed to, as umpires in diſputes, the Roman prelates were not at all exalted into authoritative rule over their fellows. This abuſe like all others grew up by degrees; and chiefly by a ſucceſſion of crafty, ambitious, and intriguing pontiffs embracing, in a ſyſtem of uniform policy, every occaſion to aggrandize themſelves, and exalt the power of their ſee. This they ſucceſsfully practiſed, till, as we ſhall ſee, they trampled at laſt upon the proſtrate world. It is grievous to recount the hiſtory of a Church, called Chriſtian, where all the prominent features ſpeak nothing, but the pride, ambition, and abominations of its moſt diſtinguiſhed rulers. A gracious man knows how to ſeparate the precious from the vile, and can diſcern amidſt all abuſes a glorious Church,

not having ſpot or blemiſh or any ſuch thing; not indeed in theſe diſgraces to the Chriſtian name, but in the hidden, ſecret, faithful few; who entered into none of theſe depths of ſatan; lived in humility, zeal, heavenly mindedneſs and fidelity; loved the Lord Jeſus Chriſt out of a pure heart fervently, and walked in all the ordinances of the Lord blameleſs.

As theoretical opinions drawn from the platonic ſchool afforded ſuch a noble field for polemic ſkill, in all the various explanations, definitions, and learned efforts to convey preciſe ideas, in ſubjects incomprehenſible, and above the graſp of the human intellect; ſo had the ſame philoſophy introduced the prepoſterous notion of a purificatory proceſs to paſs on departed ſpirits—the tranſcendent excellence of abſtractedneſs of mind—the honour of ſolitude and celibacy; as leſs expoſing to demoniacal impreſſions and poſſeſſions—and the charms and ſpells to avert their influence and malignity. The martyrs had alſo riſen into wonderful and criminal veneration. Their relics, tombs, were ſuppoſed to poſſeſs ſingular ſanctity, and to afford protection from theſe wicked ſpirits. A deſire to render Chriſtianity more palatable, led to the adoption of the ceremonies of paganiſm, only altering their objects; and putting ſaints and martyrs in the room of the deities that were exploded. Thus as we have ſeen

in

in the decrees of Gregory Thaumaturgus, the feſtivals of theſe confeſſors indulged the Gentile converts in all the ſports, amuſements, and bacchanalian enjoyments, which had been the great delight of the heathen temples. Viſitation of the tombs led to diſtant pilgrimages, where men more famous had lived and died; eſpecially to Jeruſalem, where Chriſt and his Apoſtles had reſided, and chiefly expired. And as the difficulties and the diſtance encreaſed the meritorioufneſs of the act, theſe kind of penances became faſhionable, and highly ſpoken of. The very duſt from the tombs was brought home as precious: and a tooth, or a bone, eſteemed an invaluable acquiſition. With ſuch fooleries could the Chriſtian world be amuſed, deceived, and enſlaved; laid open to all the juggles of an intereſted prieſthood, and a veneration inculcated for things and perſons, that produced an accumulated load of ſuperſtitions, ceremonies, and obſervances, ſuperſeding the whole of evangelical and vital religion. All the artifices of heathen prieſts were coarſely imitated by their Chriſtian ſucceſſors. Prodigies, miracles, viſions, conflicts with the devil were pretended, to give ſanctity to places and perſons, in order to multiply objects of devotion; encourage pilgrimages; encreaſe a veneration for the office, and to fill the pockets of the clergy. Such was the general body of the Church in theſe laſt golden days of Conſtantine.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

OF THE TRUE CHURCH.

IN the midſt of all theſe conflicts, diſputes, and follies, Chriſtianity extended its pale in the Eaſt, and to the North. Perſia was full of profeſſing Chriſtians, perſecuted by Sapor, and ſupported by Conſtantine, who obtained peace for them. But the outward diffuſion of the knowledge of Chriſtianity, muſt be ever diſtinguiſhed from the poſſeſſion of the truth in the love of it, and the gift of the Holy Ghoſt to thoſe, who are choſen from the beginning to ſalvation through ſanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and ſprinkling of the blood of Jeſus Chriſt. Theſe, as they will always be, the few, the poor, the deſpiſed, the fooliſh things of this world, ſtand forward with no prominence of human obſervation, and therefore afford no particular grounds for notice, from thoſe by whom the records of hiſtory have been handed down to us. They were too ſimple to enter into all the learned diſputes and definitions, and were content to worſhip God the Son, as the excellent before them had done, as the true God; and to acknowledge a triune Jehovah without attempting to comprehend the mode of his exiſtence; ſatisfied with

with the heartfelt knowledge and experience of the grace of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghoſt. Though probably not altogether free from a tincture of the prevailing ſuperſtitions, attention to the revealed word preſerved them in the exerciſe of faith which worketh by love, and ſtill ready to die for their Lord if duty called. Nor do I doubt, but among the biſhops themſelves there were bleſſed men, of true faith and primitive manners, ſuch as Hoſius, of Corduba, and Paphnutius, and many others in the eſtabliſhed Church, as well as among the Novatian, Donatiſt and Meleſian prelates. Men uninfected with courtly ambition and worldly objects, and ſeeking in ſimplicity the ſheep of Chriſt ſcattered through this preſent evil world: a holy ſeed according to the election of grace. In theſe I conſider the true Church as ſubſiſting, the living members of Chriſt's myſtical body; baptiſed into Chriſt, and having put on Chriſt. Exactly as at preſent, they are ſeparate and diſtinct from their fellows whilſt dwelling among them, and though outwardly ſharing in the ſame worſhip and ordinances, men eſſentially of a different ſpirit, full of faith and of the Holy Ghoſt, and adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. Such the philoſopher Ammianus deſcribes them in a thread bare coat, and contraſts them with the pride, pomp, and pageantry of their brethren.

SECT.

SECT. VI.

FROM CONSTANTIUS TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIFORMITY BY THEODOSIUS.

PART II.

CENT. IV. TO THE END.

CHAP. I.

THE SUCCESSORS OF CONSTANTINE TO THEODOSIUS.

THE ſeat of empire having been now removed to Conſtantinople, the riſing glories of the new metropolis, began to eclipſe the ſplendor, diminiſh the influence, and diſpute the ſuperiority of the ancient capital. The reſidence of the Emperor, and the preſence of the Conſtantinopolitan patriarch at his court, gave him a weight and dignity, which threatened to overwhelm his competitor at Rome, and to ſecure to him, imperial prelatical ſupremacy. Yet this was held under the Emperor; who now, in all cauſes as well eccleſiaſtical

cal as civil, exerciſed undiſputed dominion: and he clothed with the weight of his authority the councils, which by his edicts were aſſembled. In theſe the Biſhop of Rome as yet, had eſtabliſhed neither right of preſidence or controul.

An. 337—340. On the death of Conſtantine, his three ſons divided the empire. Constantine the IId. had Britain, Gaul, and Spain: Constans, Illyricum, Africa and Italy; while Constantius poſſeſſed the Eaſt with the new metropolis, the ſeat of his father's erection. Ambitious diſcord between the two firſt ſoon ended in the death of the elder, and the annexing his dominions to thoſe of Conſtans. Nor did Conſtans himſelf long enjoy the fruits of his fratricide, being ſlain by the ſword of Magnentius, who aſpired to empire, and contended with Conſtantius for univerſal dominion. But failing in the conteſt, in rage and deſpair, he laid violent hands on himſelf, and left the world again ſubject to the ſon, as it had been to the father.

An. 350. Conſtantius ſeems to have embraced his father's religion; brought up probably under the ſame tuition, and feeling the fatal influence of the two Arian Euſebiuſes, and his ſiſter Conſtantia. The court was Arian; and therefore this became the faſhionable religion. The party now uppermoſt failed

failed not to improve the opportunity of oppreſſing the orthodox, urging the perverted Emperor to acts of violence againſt the patrons of the Nicene creed; who were reſolute in rejecting communion with Arius and his eſpouſers. Council upon council, and ſynod upon ſynod were held: ſuch having become the important cares of empire. In theſe aſſemblies, the Arians, ſupported by the Emperor, uſually were ſuperior, and cauſed the moſt vigorous of their opponents to be brow-beaten, oppreſſed and depoſed by the abuſed power of imperial authority. The old and orthodox patriarch of Conſtantinople, recommended a ſucceſſor, who was choſen by the people and the preſbyters to fill the ſee; but being known to be in the oppoſition to the Arian and courtly party, Conſtantius by his own authority ordered his depoſition, and placed Euſebius of Nicomedia, the zealous friend of Arius, in the ſee, aſſuming the appointment of all the ſuperior officers in the Church.

It was impoſſible, but theſe proceedings ſhould excite the moſt violent ſenſations in the Chriſtian world, and rouſe all the zeal of polemics in defence of the true and eſtabliſhed doctrine. The deity of God our Saviour was not an article of faith, that would admit of compromiſe. Many thought in that day, as we do, that all the ſalvation of ſinners depended on the faith in this eſſential truth: and

and therefore contended for it ſtoutly; I acknowledge, often too violently, and to the diſhonour of the cauſe, which they eſpouſed. Yet, on the other ſide the Arian weapons of warfare appear ſtill more carnal in ambiguity, deceit, intrigue, mean courting of the great, and the ſtrong arm of vengeance on their adverſaries: from which laſt charge alſo the orthodox when in power, cannot be exculpated. The truth as it is Jeſus, receives no more impeachment from the unchriſtian conduct of its profeſſors, than from the bitterneſs of its oppoſers. The ſun is not contaminated by the dunghill on which it ſhines.

A proteſt of an hundred biſhops aſſembled under the famed Athanaſius, againſt the depoſition of Paul, and the election of Euſebius, produced only the Emperor's wrath, another ſynod, and his own depoſition. To accompliſh this an armed force was neceſſary, the influence of Athanaſius in Alexandria and Egypt being ſo great. After a violent ſtruggle, and many acts of cruelty, Athanaſius, juſtly apprehenſive for his life, fled to Rome; as yet the uncorrupted ſeat of orthodoxy.

I revere and honour Athanaſius, but I hear his repreſentations of his enemies with the ſuſpicion, that a knowledge of my own heart compels me to exerciſe. That great violences might be committed by the new patriarch Gregory, and his imperial

perial ſupporter, the prefect of Egypt, Philagrius, I will not diſpute: but that no provocations were given; no tumults made; no abuſe uttered; or contempt ſhown to eſtabliſhed authority; I dare neither ſay nor ſuppoſe. I rather imagine both ſides were wrong, though I believe, not equally wrong.

Under the wing of Julius, Biſhop of Rome, and the protection of Conſtans, Emperor of the Weſt, whoſe throne Magnentius had not yet overturned, and who profeſſed adherence to the Nicene creed, Athanaſius reſted for a while in exile, and juſtified himſelf in a council held at Rome, from the accuſations of all his enemies.

An. 347. The two Emperors now agreed on a general council at Sardica, but inſtead of healing the diviſions, the ſame aſperity, the ſame animoſity widened the breach, and the combatants parted more irreconcileable than ever. Indeed it is hardly poſſible it ſhould be otherwiſe. The matter in diſpute was incapable of compromiſe. Athanaſius however obtained a vindication and acquittal from all the charges laid againſt him. A few trifling canons mark the ſpirit of the times. The forbidding the tranſlation of biſhops—their journeys to court—or abiding in another biſhop's dioceſe to

ſupplant them—and enjoining reſidence in their own. I ſmile at the reſemblance of ancient and modern epiſcopacy.

The Eaſtern Church ſeems generally infected with Arianiſm, and ſupported that cauſe with vigour, and excommunications of the orthodox: who were little behind them in anathemas. Meantime the affections of the Alexandrians to their exiled patriarch compelled Conſtantius to invite his return on the vacancy of the ſee by the death of Gregory. Athanaſius met Conſtantius in his way at Antioch, and was graciouſly received. Euſtathius who had been depoſed from that ſee, had there formed a congregation of thoſe who adhered to him, and the Nicene faith. Flavian had ſucceeded him in his meeting-houſe. He firſt made uſe of the celebrated doxology, afterwards generally adopted by the orthodox. With him Athanaſius united; attended his conventicle, and joined with him in communion, refuſing all Chriſtian fellowſhip with Leontius, the Biſhop of Antioch, as a reputed Arian. When biſhops forſake the confeſſion of the true faith, and preſume the Church muſt be with its dignities and emoluments, we muſt forſake them, and not be the dupes of names. The true Church is only with thoſe who own, worſhip, and love the triune God. Thus did Athanaſius. The patriarch

patriarch of Alexandria, the ornament of his day, preferred the conventicle of Flavian, to the cathedral of Leontius. Let the bigots to church-walls remember this. AN. 349.

Preſſed by the Emperor to leave the Arians in poſſeſſion of a Church at Alexandria, he conſented, on condition; that a ſimilar indulgence were granted to the Euſtathians at Antioch: another beautiful manifeſtation of his candor and diſpoſition to the Chriſtian ſyſtem, of mutual toleration. Athanaſius was firm in the truth, and could not yield a tittle in point of doctrine, but he was no ſuch bigot as he is repreſented, or uncharitable. The truths of God will not bear accommodation to a fancied candor or charitableneſs of judgment. I may poſſeſs the kindeſt ſpirit, and practice the fulleſt exerciſe of toleration and forbearance, and yet deciſively declare that except a man believe the Catholic faith he cannot be ſaved. In my view, the damnatory clauſes of the creed, which bears his name, breathe the nobleſt exerciſe of true Chriſtian charity.

The return of Athanaſius to his Church, was a day of triumph to the orthodox: though I am aſhamed to record the manner in which ſome expreſſed their joy, by devoting themſelves to a mo-

naſtic life; an evil that now began to ſpread with rapid ſtrides, and was countenanced by thoſe who little apprehended the abuſes which would grow out of it.

An. 351—355. The power of Conſtantius becoming univerſal by his ſole poſſeſſion of the empire, his Arian adviſers renewed their efforts with ſucceſs to humble their enemies, and to ſpread their tenets unoppoſed, under imperial patronage. Paul of Conſtantinople, firſt baniſhed, and then ſtrangled, is ſaid to have made way for the ſucceſſion of Macedonius, with much violence and bloodſhed. And Athanaſius, the great butt of Arian enmity, as its moſt formidable antagoniſt, did not ſit long on his ſeat undiſturbed. The Arian party, with the Emperor at its head, ſummoned a council at Milan, where, though all the menaces of the Emperor, and the clamours of his biſhops could not procure the revocation of the Nicene, and the ſubſcription to his Arian creed, the condemnation of Athanaſius, with ſome oppoſition, was conſented to, and ſubſcribed by the council with very few exceptions. On theſe diſſenters, the enraged Emperor, inſtigated by his Arian ſeducers, particularly the eunuch Euſebius, reſolved to wreak his vengeance. Lucifer of Cagliari, Euſebius of Vercellæ, Dionyſius of Cappadocia, were baniſhed: Maximus

mus of Naples was tortured, and died in exile; and Liberius of Rome, for his faithful boldneſs, baniſhed into Thrace. Hoſius, the reverend and aged biſhop of Corduba, who had been a confeſſor under Diocleſian, and for many years the zealous defender of the truth by his labours and pen, as he was the ornament of it by a holy converſation, remained an object of hatred. He diſdained to temporiſe, and wrote a faithful teſtimony for the truth and Athanaſius to the Emperor; warning him of the great day of account: for which act of fidelity, he was confined at Sirmium a whole year, notwithſtanding his great age and infirmities. On pain of baniſhment every biſhop muſt condemn Athanaſius, and communicate with Arians. This order, the zealous heretics, its executioners, Urſatius and Valens, took care to enforce in the moſt rigid manner; and filled the place of the exiled with abettors of the Arian cauſe. So that the Chriſtian world now trembled before the ſword of hereſy, as fearfully as it had done before the malice of paganiſm.

Athanaſius, though ſupported by his brethren of Alexandria, was compelled to yield to the ſtorm; and it was providential for him he had not been murdered, when ſeized in the church, during the celebration of the divine ſervice, he was with dif-

ficulty conveyed away to a place of ſafety by the zeal of his clergy. The Monks of the deſert concealed him, whilſt the unworthy George of Cappadocia intruded into his ſee, and like another Laud, remorſeleſs, perſecuted all who differed from him, and drove the beſt of men from their churches. AN. 356.

Sufferings united the faithful; and what the ſpirit of charity and love ought long ſince to have done, perſecution effected. The orthodox of Conſtantinople and the Novatians now cordially joined in communion, and were expoſed to the ſame enmity by the Arians, for the one truth which they embraced. Agelius, the Novatian biſhop, was expelled from his church, as well as Paul the catholic patriarch; and rather than communicate with Arians, reſolved to ſubmit to every ſuffering. Nor could they be moved by the demolition of their churches, pulled down by the Emperor's order. The ſtones may be removed, but the truth of the divinity of God our Saviour defies all the impotent efforts of its enemies.

AN. 357. Liberius tired of exile, at laſt weakly, as wickedly ſubſcribed the Arian creed, and the condemnation of Athanaſius. Infallibility was not yet claimed by the Roman Pontiff: beſides, the biſhoprick

biſhoprick of Rome was *a very good thing*, and people muſt not be too ſcrupulous. Let no biſhop haſtily condemn him. Even old Hoſius of Corduba ſubſcribed at laſt, in order to obtain his liberty, a creed, ambiguous indeed; but the condemnation of Athanaſius could not be extorted from him.

Council upon council, at Rimini and Ravenna, now confirmed the courtly religion. Arian ſubſcriptions, generally adopted, ſhewed the infamous worldly-mindedneſs, and the hypocriſy of the prelatical tribe of that day. When a biſhopric, and the true and proper deity of the Son of God, were put in competition, we can hardly doubt which will carry it in the heart and choice of every worldling.

Athanaſius, from his deſert concealment, iſſued forth his defences of himſelf, and of his doctrine; to the former many objections may be taken; to the latter none can be juſtly formed, by thoſe who hold the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity. I mention one beautiful paragraph only, it is conciſe and concluſive. "The Father cannot be the Son, nor "the Son the Father; and the Holy Ghoſt is "never called by the name of the Son, but is call-"ed the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. The

" holy Trinity is but one divine nature, and one
" God, with which nothing created can be joined.
" This is ſufficient for the faithful; human know-
" ledge goes no farther. The cherubims veil the
" reſt with their wings."

An. 361. In the midſt of theſe contentions the Emperor cloſed his life of tumult, and councils; having juſt depoſed Miletius, and conferred the ſee of Antioch on Euzoius, the pillar of the Arian hereſy; from whoſe hands, ſhortly before his death, he received baptiſm: deluded with the wretched idea then commonly entertained, that thereby all ſins were cancelled, and a ready paſſport gained to Heaven. Such opinions, and ſuch biſhops, muſt give us the moſt humiliating idea of the degraded ſtate of the Chriſtian Church, in every thing which conſtitutes the vitals of Chriſtianity.

Julian, his ſucceſſor, had eſcaped the maſſacre of his relations. Conſtantius, on his acceſſion to empire, had murdered the two brothers of the late Emperor, Conſtantius Dalmatius, and Julius Conſtantius, with their children, who had been put in poſſeſſion of Thrace, Macedon and Achaia, which he ſeized. Two infant ſons of Julius Conſtantius alone were ſpared, too young to excite the apprehenſions of the jealous and bloody Emperor. Theſe

he

he educated privately among the clergy, and they were made readers in the Church. By the death of Gallus, Julian remained the only ſurviving branch of the imperial family of Conſtantine. He had been ſent to command in Gaul, and was engaged in a dangerous, but ſucceſsful warfare againſt the Germans, thoſe ever dreaded enemies of the Roman empire. On a deciſive victory, his army by acclamation ſaluted him with the title of Auguſtus, in oppoſition to all his earneſt and reiterated remonſtrances, againſt accepting this high and dangerous eminence. The jealouſy and rage of Conſtantius inſtantly awoke. He was on his march to puniſh this preſumption, when arreſted by death he expired at Mopſucrene in Cilicia, and left the vacant throne to his living rival.

JULIAN, branded by hiſtorians as *the apoſtate*, hardly deſerved that name: nor poſſeſſed much leſs of true Chriſtianity than his uncle or couſin, whom in the examplarineſs of his moral conduct, he ſeems to have greatly exceeded.

The Chriſtianity he had been taught, ſcarcely merited the title. He beheld with horror his couſin's hands defiled with the blood of his neareſt relations; he ſaw all the religion of the court, conſiſting in the ambition and intrigues of ſycophant biſhops:

biſhops: and he was too far removed from the poor, and lowly Chriſtians, to have ever diſcovered the evidence of its divine power; whilſt he was tired out, and diſguſted with the bitter quarrels and contentions about abſtruſe opinions; which thoſe who were moſt violent, probably leaſt underſtood. His philoſophic friends whom he careſſed, uſed all their arts to deceive and influence him; ſtrengthened his objections; and turned his hatred for the ill-uſage of his family by profeſſing Chriſtians, againſt Chriſtianity itſelf; the truths of which he had never truly known or embraced, and therefore the profeſſion of it he eaſily renounced. From his earlieſt youth initiated in claſſic literature, his proficiency was conſiderable, as his labours were indefatigable. He produced ſeveral literary works, in which he diſplayed much vanity of ſcience, but few traits of a deep and matured underſtanding. Seduced by the flatteries of the pagan ſophiſts, he became the dupe of the moſt abject ſuperſtitions; and he betrayed as groſs an ignorance of true philoſophy, as of religion, by his implicit belief, as well as by his diligent ſtudy, of all the abſurdities of magic. His writings afford a ſtrange mixture of genius and folly, of wit and weakneſs, of candour and duplicity. Yet his virtues deſerve an honourable mention. He was as brave in the field, as diligent in the ſtudy; moſt exemplarily

exemplarily temperate, and ſober; diſdaining the indulgences of the animal man, and eager to acquire the title of philoſopher: and what above all deſerves a tribute of praiſe, in all his enmity and oppoſition to Chriſtianity, he indulged nothing of that cruelty, which had ſo often marked his pagan predeceſſors. With ſovereign power he maintained univerſal toleration. He favoured, indeed, the ſuperſtitions, which he himſelf practiſed; but he compelled no man, by any pains and penalties to conform to them. He condeſcended, as an author, fairly to enter the liſts with argument and ridicule, as more potent adverſaries had done before; and if accuſed of attempting to undermine the Church, encouraging ſectaries and ſchiſmatics; and ſhutting up the ſchools of philoſophy from the Chriſtians: I ſee nothing in all this inconſiſtent with the character of a perfectly honeſt, but miſtaken man; and only admire, that with the force of the empire at his beck, he ſhould refrain from uſing weapons too congenial with the fallen ſpirit. His tolerant indulgence of all ſectaries is but the duty of every governor, whatever his religion be; and the policy of it, as well as juſtice, deſerves to be imitated. He did not much harm to true Chriſtianity, by ſhutting up the philoſophic ſchools; whilſt he left to every man the free peruſal of the word of God: and how he undermined Chriſtianity,

nity, more than every rational philoſophic Chriſtian has done ſince, I ſee not. I admire his candour, his lenity, his tolerance: I pity his misfortune in being expoſed to ſuch adviſers, and being deſtitute of underſtanding, as of grace, in adopting ſuch ſenſeleſs ſuperſtitions. Chriſtians have abuſed him with an aſperity, and infidels vaunted his excellences with an exaggeration, of which he was equally undeſerving.

His favour to the Jews, in permitting them to rebuild their deſolate temple, ſeems perfectly conſiſtent with the general toleration he had granted; and might or might not be deſigned with particular enmity to the Chriſtian faith: whether this was interrupted by balls of fire, or the death of the Emperor, ſeems not to weigh a hair in the ſcale of Chriſtianity. I confeſs myſelf more inclined to accede to the repreſentation of Baſnage, than of Warburton; and fear greatly, that if Julian was not quite as good a Chriſtian, as the biſhop, he was probably a better man; fully perſuaded, had their ſituations been reverſed, the biſhop would have preferred perſecution to tolerance.

An. 363. His death however put a period to all his purpoſes. After a ſhort reign of twenty months, he fell in the flower of his age, in an expedition

pedition againſt the Perſian monarch, by the lance of a common ſoldier. So that from him Chriſtianity could have received no material injury: and I am perſuaded, however malignant his intentions might be, the *true* Church enjoyed under him, all that real Chriſtians need deſire, tolerance and peace.

An. 363. Jovian, during his ſhort reign, approved himſelf a cordial friend to the Church of Chriſt; and though blamed for his political conduct, appears an eminent inſtance of true wiſdom and piety; maintaining general toleration even to pagans, whilſt he promoted the faith which he himſelf embraced with his countenance and ſupport, without violence or perſecution of thoſe who differed from him. Under him Athanaſius, drawn from his concealment, returned to govern till the Emperor's death, the church of Alexandria, and to enjoy a ſhort-lived gleam of proſperity, which he had ſeldom known.

An. 364. Valentinian and Valens, ſucceeding to the empire, though brothers, took different lines of conduct. Valentinian protected, like Jovian, the orthodox; whilſt Valens, deeply rooted in the Arian hereſy, renewed in the Eaſt, his portion of empire, the perſecution againſt the Nicene abet-

tors;

tors; expelled them from the ſeat of prelacy, and placed the churches under the care of thoſe of his own faith. The Novatians ſhared in this baniſhment with the Catholic Church: their biſhop's eminent piety and excellence ſtands on record; and when, through favour, they were indulged with reſtoration to their places of worſhip, they kindly embraced in communion, and affectionately treated their perſecuted brethren of the general Church. How much more noble a ſpirit does this exhibit, than all the narrow bitterneſs of bigotry?

AN. 371. Athanaſius ſuffered another baniſhment through Arian malice; but was again recalled to his ſee, notwithſtanding all the intrigues of his enemies, and permitted there to die in peace; the brighteſt ornament among the eminent of his day. That he was not exempt from many things highly blameable, is certain: yet, if we dare not palliate his faults, candour forbids ſevere reprehenſion, and wiſhes to impute them rather to the times, than to the man.

VALENS, like his predeceſſors, held councils; and if we judge by the canons, deplorable muſt have been the ſtate of the Chriſtian world. The metropolitans were to appoint biſhops, and they preſbyters,

preſbyters, " which," Mr. Milner ſays, " the " apoſtles had done, who doubtleſs ordained paſtors in all the churches *by their own authority*." I have diligently examined the Scriptures, and very much doubt whether the apoſtles ever exerciſed any ſuch abſolute authority. When a church was collected by them in any place, the congregation, I apprehend, always choſe and approved the elders and biſhops who were ſet over them, and theſe the apoſtles ordained; and no appointment of paſtors over a church ever appears, by the apoſtles, without their concurrence. But theſe epiſcopal encroachments correſponded with the diſſolute manners againſt which other canons are levelled, with angel-worſhip—and magic—and enchantment, ſtrange practices for Chriſtian preſbyters.

AN. 378, 379. VALENS periſhed in battle. His ſucceſſors, Gratian and Honorius, concurred in their endeavours to ſuppreſs paganiſm, and erect the banners of the croſs; but none uſed methods ſo ſtrong and ſevere as Theodoſius, who has received the name of *great* from thoſe whom he favoured; though, I confeſs, I find nothing in the man or his manners deſerving ſuch a title. His temper was violent, and his government tyrannical. In order to ſuppreſs paganiſm, he made it a capital crime to ſacrifice or attend any of its rites.

Reſolved

Reſolved to eſtabliſh *uniformity* of religion and worſhip throughout the empire, he enacted the cruelest pains and penalties againſt thoſe who refuſed to conform to *his eſtabliſhment*. He is highly commended by the great luminaries of that day, Ambroſe and others, for his zeal: and it muſt be owned, that he gave as humbling a leſſon of ſubmiſſion to their inſolence and ſuperſtitions, as he himſelf exerciſed imperial violence and oppreſſion againſt all who dared to diſſent from them. Libanius, the friend of Julian, and ſtill attached to heatheniſm, preſumed to addreſs the Emperor, and teach him leſſons of Chriſtianity and moderation. "That religion ought to be planted in men's "minds by reaſon, not by force." To which maxim, however contrarily the heathen philoſophers had acted, the truth of it was not the leſs, and Chriſtian governors ought to conſider its juſtice: but abuſed power and ſuperſtition, under the dominion of prelatical arrogance, will always be juſtified; and perſecution in them be clothed with the pious guiſe of ſalutary coercion. I openly deſire to teſtify my abhorrence of all ſuch conduct: fully perſuaded that nothing can be more oppoſite to the ſpirit and temper of the Goſpel: and ſo far from being ſubſervient to its real intereſt, muſt tend in the higheſt manner to debaſe Chriſtianity, and to promote hypocriſy and falſe religion. The truth

truth needs no ſuch auxiliaries. I am ſorry to differ wonderfully from St. Ambroſe and Mr. Milner, in the character of Theodoſius, as very doubtful, in my view of real Chriſtianity. I can behold an overbearing Emperor—paſſionately reſolved to bow the necks of his ſubjects to his religious opinions—a fierce bigot—eſtabliſhing uniformity by the moſt unchriſtian edicts: and, except his zeal for orthodoxy, I ſee in him no traits of eminent piety, or vital godlineſs.—BUT—he was an Emperor.

CHAP. II.

THE PREVAILING SCHISMS AND HERESIES.

THE good Biſhop of Cagliari, Lucifer, by ordaining Paulinus at Antioch, in oppoſition to the Arian Euzoius, incurred cenſure; and even his fellow ſufferer, Euſebius of Vercellæ, broke off communication from him. If any man aſk wherein this ſchiſm conſiſted, I confeſs, I am at a loſs to tell: but I preſume the ſacred immunities of the ſee of Antioch muſt have been ſuppoſed to ſuffer ſome infringment hereby. That good men, exiled, ready to become martyrs, can for theſe trifles quarrel, and excommunicate each other, is a humbling proof of human weakneſs, and of the difficulty of ſuppreſſing the ſpirit of bigotry even in the beſt; ſo ſtrongly do our educational prejudices cleave to us.

The Novatians ſtill maintained their ground; and every teſtimony is borne to their remarkable purity of doctrine, and piety of conduct, their zealous ſuffering for the truth, and cordial affection to the good men of the ſuffering Church who differed from them: *But*—they were ſchiſmatics.

The

The *Meletians* continued nearly in the ſame predicament as the Novatians: whilſt the Donatiſts are accuſed of great violences and acts of atrocity. I think there ought to be a diſtinction made between ſome of the furious of that ſect, called Circumcelliones, irritated probably by acts of oppreſſion, and the general body of Donatiſt biſhops and preſbyters, among whom the ſpirit of Chriſtian truth and purity was by no means extinct.

The Priſcilianiſts, a new ſect in Spain, fell under ſuſpicion; and accuſed by the biſhop Ithacius, afforded a precedent for puniſhing hereſy with death, of which we have ſince had too many examples. AN. 384.

The Manichæans ſubſiſted in vigour, and their fanciful opinions found many abettors: even Auguſtin, afterwards ſo famous, joined himſelf to them. But the great hereſy was, Arianiſm, from its higheſt pitch of what is called Semi-arianiſm, to the loweſt degradation of admitted Deity, in any ſenſe: about which, indeed, the diſputes have been many, and diſtinctions upon diſtinctions endleſs framed, as if there could be any thing between ſelf-exiſtent, and created; and that any ſhades of ſecondary deity could degrade or exalt the perſon, denied to be *the true God*. For nearly forty years Arianiſm was the prevalent religion, eſpecially in

the Eaſt; and except Athanaſius, and a very few reſolute witneſſes for the truth, whom no menaces could terrify, or death induce to temporize, all the biſhops of any name, in the Chriſtian world, at Rome, Antioch, Conſtantinople, and Alexandria, ſubſcribed the Arian creed; ſubmitted to the Emperor; and kept their biſhoprics. What the body of the people muſt be under ſuch teachers, it is not difficult to ſuppoſe; and when, added to the unſoundneſs in the faith, the reign of ſuperſtitions deſtructive of all true religion is conſidered: the days were arrived, when the great Head of the Church, ſhould he come, would hardly find faith on the earth. For even the orthodox managed their diſputes in a manner ſo anti-chriſtian, that victory thus obtained was no triumph: and with regard to all the trumpery of ſuperſtition and monkery, they were as deeply involved in theſe, or more ſo, even than their rivals. The Monks and Solitaries, were all Nicene creed-men; and indeed, to eſcape perſecution, and to maintain in peace and quiet, their opinions, was probably one of the firſt cauſes of flight into the deſerts. They were always eſpouſed and patronized by Athanaſius, and zealous to preſerve him in his baniſhments. Their eſtabliſhment under the fanatic Anthony, was regulated by rule; different communities were formed; and thence ſpread their baneful influence over the Chriſtian world. Died AN. 357.

The

The platonic philoſophy ſo highly revered, having eſtabliſhed the maxim, "of the neceſſity of "abſtractedneſs of ſpirit from body, in order to "come into communion with God," every bodily mortification became preſcribed, to attain this deſirable end. The famous Dionyſius gained incredible numbers of proſelytes, by his inſtructions how to raiſe the ſoul by contemplation to the higheſt perfection of its nature, in abſorption with God. In order to this, celibacy, and virginity, faſting, poverty, nakedneſs, ſelf-inflicted puniſhments, ſolitude, became recommended as the firſt of attainments, and eſſential to eradicate every thing human from the heart. The great St. Anthony figures highly in this line; and his life, by Athanaſius, is as mortifying a proof of the ſpirit of the biographer, as of the hero of the tale; and an afflicting evidence of the piety, then had in higheſt eſtimation. I turn from it in diſguſt, and am amazed that a man of Mr. Milner's ſpirit can affect to gloſs it over with lines of palliation, if not of approbation. The pride and ſelf-righteouſneſs of the human heart ought not ſo to be treated. To exalt ſuch a character, even Athanaſius can report miracles the moſt abſurd, ridiculous, and contemptible: whilſt Anthony pretends to live without food, and to enjoy ſuch viſions of God, and conflicts with demons, as excite at once our horror, and riſibility; but he had one virtue paramount.

mount—He and his Cænobites were the determined foes to Arianiſm, and friends to Athanaſius.

From theſe, all the raggamuffin orders of friars and nuns, black, white and grey, have ſince ſprung. But, even la Trappe, is diſtanced in auſterities by Anthony and his aſſociates. Monaſtic piety grew into the higheſt reputation, and as ambition of clerical honours was not among the things excluded from monaſteries, their preſumed ſanctity afforded a rich ſupply for the prelatical corps, from theſe enthuſiaſtic aſcetics. Vices and ſcandalous practices cannot but creep in, even amidſt every outward reſtraint: they have been proved to exiſt in a fearful manner among theſe abſtracted beings. But I muſt give the firſt monks credit for the purity of their conduct: and ſuppoſe the generality of them, honeſtly exerciſed all the mortifications, which they believed ſo meritorious, however ſome feebler brother might be ſeduced by temptation.

It would be loſs of time to recount the other eminent men in this way. *Ex uno diſce omnes.* I think St. Anthony the beſt of them. Paul, Martyn of Tours, and all the herd of theſe ornaments of monkery, afford an unvarying tiſſue of pious frauds, falſe miracles, debaſing ſuperſtition, and the moſt

inſolent

inſolent pride. It muſt be a dark church indeed that can challenge theſe for its luminaries.

But maxims of the moſt deſtructive nature had now become ſanctioned by the firſt authority, and practiſed by orthodox and heretics alike. "That "fraud is pious, when employed to promote the "intereſts of the Church;" and that, "Errors in "religion called for the ſword of the magiſtrate." Thus craft and cruelty became eſtabliſhed as by law. The conſequences we have ſeen; and ſhall with anguiſh have occaſion to renew our indignation.

CHAP. III.

OF THE PRINCIPAL PERSONAGES.

ATHANASIUS.

Elected Biſhop - - An. 326
Died - - - 373

AMONG the firſt characters of the age, the Biſhop of Alexandria is to be juſtly reckoned. The ſteadfaſtneſs of his faith, and the purity of his life; his vaſt influence in the affairs of the Church, and the happy ſucceſs of his labours, have been already in part conſidered. The creed which bears his name, and conveys his ſentiments, will remain to the lateſt poſterity among the nobleſt human monuments of the confeſſion of the true faith, once delivered to the ſaints. His abilities, learning, zeal, fortitude, his enemies will not deny him. Some ſweet traits of his charity, humility, and ſuperiority to all bigotted church attachments, mark a man of a ſingularly excellent ſpirit. His credulity, attachment to the monks, and ſome want of Chriſtian meekneſs towards his perſecutors, his friends will not vindicate. The torrent of ſuperſtition bore him

him down, and his temper was not always proof againſt provocation. But take him for all in all, he ſeems the brighteſt ornament of that high ſtation, to which he had been advanced. I ſhall look for greater Chriſtians in humbler life, no where for a more able defender of the cauſe of God and truth.

EUSEBIUS OF CÆSARIA.

Elected - -	An. 313
Died - - -	340

This famed prelate, remarkable for his knowledge, reading, and eccleſiaſtical inveſtigations, ſtands eminent among the firſt authorities for church hiſtory. But if I remain of the ſame opinion, that I was at the beginning, it is becauſe every thing, I have ſeen and read, confirms me in his partiality, credulity, and unfair repreſentations; wherever the intereſts of the party which he eſpouſed, were concerned. The learned tranſlator of Moſheim endeavours to vindicate him from the charge of Arianiſm, though he admits it proved, that Euſebius maintained a certain diſparity and ſubordination, between the perſons of the godhead. I have before obſerved, the contemptibility of theſe evaſions, and the inſignificance of all the ſhades, where true eſſential deity is denied to God our Saviour.

Euſebius

Euſebius was a great favourite at court. No good ſign for a biſhop, under two ſuch monarchs as Conſtantine and Conſtantius. And to his influence and inſtructions much is to be attributed, in all the ſubſequent ſtruggles between Arianiſm and Orthodoxy. Whether he thought in all things as Arius, or not, it is certain he ſupported him and his adherents. He, with his nameſake of Nicomedia, were the pillars of the Arian hereſy.

AMBROSE OF MILAN.

Elected	- - -	374
Died	- - -	890

That it was an age of childiſh credulity, Mr. Milner admits, but he ſeems leſs diſpoſed to perceive the evil effects reſulting from the prelatical claims, which Ambroſe was diſpoſed to uſe in their largeſt extent. His reluctant appointment to the church of Milan; the very improper ſteps he took to be excuſed, and his extorted compliance, are known; unfit for the office, as he acknowledges, he began to ſeek his qualifications in the diligent ſtudy of Origen. A worſe inſtructor he could not have choſen. His zeal however againſt Arianiſm ſhone forth conſpicuouſly, and the ſtand he made againſt the Emperor, and his mother Juſtina, are proofs of it, not always perhaps according to knowledge.

Sincere,

Sincere, charitable, devout; in conduct exemplary, and in the labours of his office diligent; yet had he drank deep into the ſpirit of the times. His ſiſter, a zealous devotee for virginity, drew forth from him the moſt immoderate encomiums of that ſtate: and his treatiſes on the ſubject, puerile indeed, and jejune, much promoted the deluſion, to the great grief of many parents. The piety of ſuperſtition is awfully equivocal. How high the ſpirit of true godlineſs was in the church of Milan, I muſt learn from ſomething beſides their church muſic, and the Ambroſian chant. It gives me no favourable idea of the paſtor, or people, to find him unable to conſecrate a church for want of *relics*. But, lo! at the difficult moment, a viſion! more than was wanted, is diſcovered, even two bodies of martyrs! The wondrous miracles wrought on this occaſion; a blind man reſtored to ſight, devils caſt out; the happy dedication of the Church; and the compleat triumph of Orthodoxy over Arianiſm are recorded! What indeed could reſiſt the prelate, who produced *men poſſeſſed of devils* to teſtify before the relics of St. Protaſius and St. Gervaſius, the truth of the Nicene creed? If St. Ambroſe was not more ſucceſsful in his ſermons, and urged ſome better arguments than theſe, it would ſeem of little importance, whether the Milaneſe, were Arians or Trinitarians. His funeral oration over ſuch a man as the Emperor *Valentinian*, needs only to be read,

to

to ſtamp the courtly prelate with hypocriſy, or the rhetorical declaimer with contempt. His diſcipline reſpecting Theodoſius, is a glaring proof of prelatical inſolence over abject ſuperſtition: and all done for the honour of the Church. So ſubmiſſive an Emperor could not but ſecure the encomiums of the Milaneſe diſciplinarian.

The life of this biſhop extant, prefixed to his works, Mr. Milner ſuppoſes not genuine, becauſe, "ſtuffed with fables." I am afraid this is the ſtrongeſt evidence of its truth: ſuch being the very ſpirit of the times. That he was liberal, devoted to his office, aſſiduous in the obſervance of all church duties, is a praiſe he truly merits. His works are various, but alas! they diſplay no excellencies of a peculiar nature. His divinity is wretched, and often unſcriptural; and his moral treatiſes inſignificant. His interpretations were formed on the model of his maſter Origen, and as abſurdly allegorical. Of the doctrines of predeſtination and grace, he appears to have very falſe conceptions. He was ſtrongly diſpoſed to venerate relics; and to entertain ſuperſtitious expectations from the interceſſion of the dead. And no man was more an advocate for monaſtic inſtitutions; and the divinity of his epiſcopal office. I repeat a remark I have made before, that all the fathers I have ever conſulted are but miſerable guides to evangelical truth.

There

There is more clearneſs of goſpel doctrine, more genuine purity of truth, and more beautiful application of it to the conſcience in one modern ſermon, than is to be found in a folio of Ambroſe.

Yet with all his defects and follies, Ambroſe is a character comparatively reſpectable, and eminent in the days in which he lived, among his fellows. Few ſuch laborious biſhops then cultivated the Lord's vineyard.

Many other worthies would but afford a repetition of nearly the ſame obſervations. The light of truth and grace was grown very dim; and the power of it, as all allow, was reduced very low: but the Church was exalted very high, full of magnificence, riches and honours: honours and riches too much coveted, and exciting the moſt ſcandalous, and often bloody contentions between ambitious rivals for preferment.

Among the numerous authors who wrote on Chriſtian ſubjects, the following hold a chief place, Macarius, Victorinus, Pacianus, Optatus, the Apollinarii, Ephraim, Hilary, Baſil, Gregory Nazianzen, Chryſoſtom, Jerom, Auguſtin. Their characters will be found detailed in Mr. Milner's Church Hiſtory: and paſſages extracted from their voluminous works with exemplary patience; ſome of them

them breathing the ſpirit of truth, piety and grace. But whoever will be at pains to conſult theſe vaſt folios themſelves, will be diſappointed at finding them ſtuffed with a farrago of ſuperſtition, errors, monkery, origeniſm, platoniſm, bitterneſs and bigotry, that will little repay the pains of peruſal. Some indeed are leſs exceptionable than others; Chryſoſtom and Auſtin are among the beſt. But, I hope I ſhall be forgiven by the veneraters of antiquity, if I prefer the moderns, on every ſubject which exerciſed the pens of theſe ancient ſages, as far ſuperior in force of argument, preciſion of doctrine, and in clearneſs of evangelical truth, and its influence. Compare the teſtament of Ephraim, with any modern theological treatiſe of reputation, or Auſtin with Edwards. The vaunted Baſil, as well as others, is drenched in all the dregs of aſcetics, falſe miracles and monkery, infecting the world with theſe moſt pernicious inſtitutions, blazoned as the perfection of Chriſtian excellence.

The father of Gregory reſided at Nazianzum, where was only one paſtor or biſhop, and one flock. Gregory's friend, the *great Baſil*, offered him the biſhopric of Saſima, a place mean and obſcure, for hitherto many little villages had their biſhop. The pride of Gregory was offended, and a quarrel ſucceeded.

An. 368 to 389. Leaving Nazianzum for Conſtantinople, Gregory at firſt preached to a few Chriſtians in a conventicle, the Arians poſſeſſing all the churches. An orthodox preſbyter, it ſeems, did not then think himſelf degraded by ſo doing. Growing highly popular by his preaching, he was advanced to the epiſcopal order. He was a man famed for eloquence, and it is eſpecially recorded of him, that his diſcourſes were animated, "*with warm and pathetic addreſſes to departed* "*ſaints*:" ſuch is the divinity to be expected from theſe eminences. Indeed all the fathers, as far as I have gone, have left on my mind the fulleſt conviction, that they were the fartheſt from infallible guides, or deciſive authority. Were errors, ſuch as are to be found in them, detected in any modern authors, they would wonderfully deſtroy their reputation, and reduce them to a very low degree of excellence. Even Ignatius, if his fourth epiſtle be genuine, "ſuppoſes the man who faſts on the "Lord's day, or any other Saturday but Eaſter "Eve, *a murderer of Chriſt*." And in correſpondence with this idea, the Council of Conſtantinople decrees, that, "if a clergyman commit this crime, "he be depoſed, and if a layman, excommunicated." Clemens Alexandrinus affirms, that, "the heathens "were juſtified before Chriſt came by philoſophy— "that Chriſt actually ſaved many out of hell by his "preaching

"preaching there—and that the torments of hell "are not eternal but purificatory." Origen, Tertullian, and many others, ſtand branded with hereſy. Even the ſoundeſt, ſuch as Ambroſe, Jerom, Chryſoſtom, all vindicate the practice of evil that good may come, and the lawfulneſs of pious frauds: nay impiouſly affirm, that both Peter and Paul inculcated, and practiſed them. Indeed they ſeverally ſtand convicted of a want of truth, that the meaneſt Chriſtian at preſent would bluſh to have laid to his charge, and confounded to have proved upon him. Mr. Milner ſtrangely apologizes, as if "in theſe "dark ages, with their dim light, theſe humble ſouls "groped their way to the heavenly kingdom." Had they not the ſame bible as ourſelves, and the ſame divine interpreter? Why then dark, ignorant, and ſuperſtitious? And for the proof of their *himility*, thoſe who read their writings will be grievouſly at a loſs. In many things they no doubt are commendable; but as enlightened Chriſtians, as deep divines, as maſters in Iſrael, we find them ſtrangely defective. It is not a little aſtoniſhing, that mere antiquity, like objects ſeen at a diſtance through the haze, ſhould have clothed them with a veneration and magnitude, to which, if we judge by their writings, they were ſo little entitled. Can error, folly, fraud, lying miracles, ſuperſtition, monkery, receive any juſtification or apology from the

the ſpirit of the times? The bible is the bible, and truth is truth, nor can admit of any unhallowed departure from them. We may and ought to pity the miſtakes of good men; and may ſafely admit much excellence compatible, with much ignorance and infirmity. But ſuch are not the oracles we may follow, or the examples we muſt imitate. Candor indeed requires that every man be allowed to explain his own ſentiments, and not to be made an offender for a word; we may not pervert an expreſſion to a meaning he would diſown, or draw concluſions for him, which he would diſallow: but no candor will call ignorance wiſdom, error excuſable, ſuperſtition devotion, ſelf-righteouſneſs the goſpel, or ſuch forced, wretched, and often falſe as well as feeble interpretations of the Scripture, ſound divinity.

An. 395. Augustin figures among the moſt eminent of the fathers, as an author; but a conſiderable portion of his writings will be found, jejune, declamatory, and ſometimes highly objectionable: and in the very point of the doctrines of grace, wherein he excels, there is more deep reaſoning, ſolid argument, preciſion of language, and ſcriptural evidence, in one page of Edwards on Free Will, than in all the voluminous works of Auguſtin put together. His conduct reſpecting

the Donatiſts will never find a parallel in the Scriptures. His arguments againſt them ſhall be allowed all their real weight; but they are greatly weakened by calling in the ſword of the civil magiſtrate, and the harſh ſyllogiſms of fines and impriſonment. Surely ſuch are not the weapons of our welfare. Yet is Auguſtin an eminent character; his principles evangelical, and the general tenor of his life highly exemplary. His little dioceſe of Hippo eminently profited by his labours; and in a day of great decay, exhibited ſpecimens of primitive Chriſtianity. But I am paſſing my preſcribed bounds of brevity.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT AND CEREMONIES.

THE Church, in all the pomp of rites and ceremonies, groaned under the load of her own trappings. Veſtments, holidays, faſts, feſtivals, ſhrines, martyr's tombs, holy water, with all the trumpery ſo happily ſince improved, had begun to deck out the meretricious Church of Rome. The growing virtue of relics, and the ſuppoſed efficacy of the interceſſion of departed ſaints, opened a door for the groſſeſt ſuperſtitions. Even Auguſtin himſelf laments, that the yoke, under which the Jews were held, was liberty, compared with the bondages impoſed on Chriſtians.

Now alſo was firſt introduced that moſt unſcriptural mode of *patronage*, ſince become ſo prevalent. To encourage the building of churches, and obtain the merit of this good work, the builder was permitted to appoint his own preſbyter. Wealth and riches had acquired the firſt importance, and the congregation of the faithful was become nothing in the ſcale.

The government of the Church was quite new modelled. Inſtead of the people chuſing their own biſhops and preſbyters, they were no more conſulted. The preſbyters wholly depended on biſhops and patrons: The biſhops were the creatures of patriarchs and metropolitans; or, if the ſee was important, appointed by the Emperor. So Church and State formed the firſt inauſpicious alliance, and the corruption which had been plentifully ſown before, now ripened by court intrigues for political biſhops of imperial appointment, or at the ſuggeſtion of the prime miniſter.

Not that there were wanting men who had ſenſe to diſcern, and courage to remonſtrate againſt the growing abuſes. Such was *Jovinian*, who denied the ſuperior ſanctity of monachiſm and celibacy, and bodily macerations, affirming that a Chriſtian who lived in marriage, and a life of temperance and piety, was equally acceptable to God. But he was ſoon ſilenced by the Biſhop of Rome, and by the famed Ambroſe, in a Milaneſe council, and baniſhed at their inſtigation to the Iſle of Boa.

Ærius, a preſbyter, made a fiercer reſiſtance, and maintained more offenſive doctrines; that biſhops and preſbyters in the Scripture were the ſame

ſame perſons, and only different deſcriptions of age and office—that prayers for the dead were futile, and hope from their interceſſion vain—that ſtated faſts and feſtivals had no preſcription in the New Teſtament. Theſe, with ſimilar aſſertions, rouſed a hoſt of enemies, and he was quickly ſilenced. So ſuperſtition ſtalked triumphant, and no man dared open his mouth againſt any abuſes. Indeed, the Monkiſh inſtitutes, and ſelf-inflicted auſterities, were regarded as the perfection of human excellence, as the higheſt form of Chriſtian attainment, the very life and ſoul of religion.

Ardœus, a man of tried godlineſs, could not keep ſilence; and freely cenſured the depraved manners of the clergy, for which he was excommunicated. He formed a little ſociety of men like-minded, over which he preſided as their biſhop: but this the intolerance of the time would not ſuffer, and he was driven with his adherents into baniſhment, continuing there to hold faſt the faithful word. Grievous charges were laid againſt him: his uncharitable judgments of the clergy—his celebrating Eaſter at the time the Jews kept the paſſover—and his worſhipping the Deity under a human form. The intolerant Church began to be armed againſt all who refuſed implicit ſubmiſſion to prelatical domination.

CHAP. V.

THE SPIRITUAL CHURCH AT THE END OF THE FOURTH CENTURY.

WE have ſeen the outward viſible Church rent with diſputes, and ſunk in pride, pomp, luxury, and ignorance. Shall we look for the body of the faithful among theſe? If we do, we muſt expect to find them not wallowing in wealth, and decked with imperial ſplendor, but among the poor of the flock, too ſimple to enter into, or underſtand the deep metaphyſical controverſies, and too truly taught of God to follow blindly the current of prevailing ſuperſtitions. As the orthodox doctrine was ſtill maintained in the churches, no doubt God's preſence was not wholly withdrawn, notwithſtanding the errors, and follies which had crept in: amidſt grievous departure from evangelical ſimplicity, much truth and godlineſs remained. Many biſhops were truly men of God, ſuch as Auguſtin, and others, with their little and obſcure flocks, who, in their contracted ſpheres, ſeem to have cultivated the pure doctrine of the Goſpel, and the life of religion among them. Of this we have

have a ſtrong teſtimony borne by Ammianus the hiſtorian, a Heathen philoſopher, and an enemy to Chriſtianity. The greater biſhoprics, as Rome, were ſeldom filled but after bitter contentions, and often bloodſhed. So Damaſus aſcended the Papal throne, fighting his opponent Urſinus. "At "Rome," ſays Ammianus, "they ride in cha- "riots; ſplendidly arrayed; enriched by the offer- "ings of the ladies; attended by a noble retinue; "feaſting luxurioufly, their tables ſurpaſſing thoſe "of kings: But how much more rationally would "they act according to their profeſſion, if they "imitated the exemplary lives of their poorer "brethren, the biſhops of the provinces, in the "plainneſs of their diet and apparel, the modeſty "of their looks, and the humility of their demean- "our, walking acceptably with the eternal God as "his true worſhippers."

A pleaſing fact thus opens to our view, that far from the theatre of eccleſiaſtical conflicts, and prelatical pride and parade, the courts of monarchs, and the thrones of cathedrals, in humble poverty, retired from ſcenes of luxury and ambition, a race of worthy paſtors fed their flocks in the oblivion of the great; not leſs reſpected by the ſheep for the thread-bare coat which covered them, nor held in leſs reverence for the modeſty and meek-

neſs of their deportment; truly apoſtolical in their manners; not lording it over God's heritage, but examples of the flock. Oh that the great Head of the Church would reſtore this holy race of biſhops to his deſolate heritage!

Under ſuch paſtors the true Church ſtill appeared glorious in the eye of the great Shepherd and Biſhop of ſouls, amidſt the ſpots and blemiſhes which disfigured it. Among the purer party, I reckon the Novatian biſhops; and probably many alſo of the Meletians, Euſtathians, and Luciferians. Nor ſhould I deſpair among the Donatiſts, that men of like manners might be found, with whatever abuſe they have been loaded. Far removed from the great ſources of corruption, riches, power, and connection with the great and philoſophic world: they gave themſelves to the word of God and to prayer; their work was their wages; and their people their crown and joy of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

Nor do I doubt but many of the ſolitaries of the deſert, who had fled from perſecution, carried with them at firſt, a real ſweet ſavour of Chriſt, and felt happy to have eſcaped from a diſordered world, to be more occupied in the work of prayer and praiſe; and when driven thither as a refuge, inſtead

inſtead of drawn by fanatical ſuperſtition, many walked with God, and went to glory.

I am enquiring after God's ſecret ones, the remnant whom the world knoweth not, the choſen and called, and faithful; the only Church worth a Chriſtian's care.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

CONTAINING

THREE DISSERTATIONS.

I. ON ESTABLISHMENTS.

II. ON SCHISM.

III. ON INFIDELITY.

INTRODUCTION.

WHEN the following ſheets were written, the reverend and learned Author of Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, Mr. Milner, lived, adorning his profeſſion by his example, and improving his generation by his labours. The great Shepherd and Biſhop of Souls hath removed him to his reward. I had hoped from him friendly rebuke where I may have erred, or candid acquieſcence in the force of truth, where it appeared. We both meant I am confident, in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity to follow the beſt convictions of the word of revelation, and in all our deductions from it, to reaſon according to the analogy of the firſt great admitted principles. Some other able brother will now perform that office; and as Divine truth is alone the object, acknowledgment of miſtake ſhall inſtantly follow the conviction of error. Errare poſſum hereticus eſſe nolo.

DISSERTATION I.

ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIFORMITY IN RELIGION, IN REPLY TO THE REV. MR. MILNER, IN HIS SECOND VOLUME OF CHURCH HISTORY.

THEODOSIUS, ſupreme in all cauſes eccleſiaſtical as civil, reſolved to reduce his Chriſtian ſubjects to uniformity with his own opinions, which he preſumed to be thoſe of the Scriptures. Inſtead of union in the one head Chriſt, held in mutual charity and forbearance, he determined to cut and ſquare religion according to his own model; and by penal laws, to compel ſubmiſſion to the eſtabliſhment which he formed. Mr. Milner undertakes to defend the propriety of this conduct. I am ſorry to differ from a man I revere, and with whom I am generally one in ſentiment and heart. I wiſh the tide of popular opinion may be againſt him, as he ſuppoſes. I fear bigotry is yet too prevalent. His arguments for ſuch eſtabliſhment I will endeavour in love and in the ſpirit of meekneſs

neſs to anſwer. The ſubject is equally important in every age. *Such* eſtabliſhments appear to me fraught with oppoſition to the *true Church*, which he profeſſes to eſpouſe.

What he takes for granted in the firſt ſentence, I can by no means admit, that "becauſe the Goſ-"pel is of divine authority, and ought to be re-"ceived, that every rejection of its doctrines is as "juſt a cauſe for condemnation, and human pe-"nalties, as murder or theft." The offences againſt ſociety are of a very different kind, and amenable to a different tribunal from thoſe of infidelity. Murder and the diſbelief of the proper divinity of Jeſus, rank in a very different line. I admit, that in the day of God, they equally will be puniſhed with eternal death: but I deny any ſhadow of Scripture authority, for inveſting the civil magiſtrate with power to puniſh the one, as they puniſh the other. His argument, therefore, in the firſt inſtance, appears utterly inconcluſive.

P. 226. The *expedience and utility* are equally diſputable, as *the right*, to inflict *pains and penalties*, for

for non-conformity to a national eſtabliſhment. Can it be proved to be right, expedient, or uſeful, to eſtabliſh Epiſcopacy in England, Preſbytery in Scotland, and Popery in Canada? And theſe under the ſame ſtate, and to puniſh with pains and penalties thoſe who differ from either? Is the temporal good of the ſubjects really conſulted by ſuch eſtabliſhments? Might they not with much greater propriety be permitted to chuſe what form of church government they like? And if they were good and faithful ſubjects, would not the preſervation and well-being of the ſociety be thus equally conſulted?

Mr. Milner's three arguments, p. 227, will, contrary to his ſuppoſition, receive, I hope, a ſatisfactory anſwer.

Reſpecting *the clear evidences of Chriſtianity*, ſhould I admit, what may be diſputed, that the evidences of Chriſtianity are perfectly *clear*, and the doctrines as *important* as can be ſuggeſted. If a perſon object, and ſay, they are *not clear* to me? Is he, therefore, whilſt profeſſing to ſubmit to the

civil laws of that ſociety to which he belongs, puniſhable becauſe he does not admit the evidences of Chriſtianity as *clear?* "The doctrines "are *important*;" allowed: but, are they all of equal importance? Which are to be fixed on as *fundamentals?* Who has the authority to determine theſe? or to meaſure the ſuppoſed *wickedneſs of heart* of thoſe, who ſhall reject what others, perhaps the majority, decide to be fundamental? Is not Mr. Milner aware, that the ſaving knowledge of theſe fundamentals can only be received from the Spirit of God? And if I have not obtained this unſpeakable gift, has the magiſtrate a right to condemn me, either for my ignorance or my obſtinacy?

Does Mr. Milner really ſuppoſe that a convenient "and well digeſted liturgy," compoſed for public uſe, ought to be enforced by *pains and penalties*, when he has ſo repeatedly avowed, that no ſuch was in the Church during all the pureſt ages? And who ſhall judge *the genuineneſs* of the principles on which ſuch liturgy is founded? Is there an *infallibility* in every church eſtabliſhment?

I am

I am ſurpriſed at the poverty, as well as the inconcluſiveneſs of theſe ſuggeſtions, in a ſpiritually minded man. The Jewiſh theocracy is no precedent, till we are in their ſituation, and have the ſame authority; nor are any reaſonings from it concluſive. Does the manner in which patriarchal families were governed, imply any *ſuch authority* as is pleaded for? Suppoſing an idolater among Abraham, Iſaac, or Jacob's ſlaves, was to be whipped, put to bread and water, or burned, if he did not ſubmit to circumciſion?

I will grant that the magiſtrates, with the majority of every nation, have a right to form religious inſtitutions for *themſelves*. Of this I ſhould hope few will doubt the lawfulneſs; and where the Chriſtian religion is generally profeſſed, diſpute the utility. Nor does it militate againſt any divine precept, why *they* may not annex advantages, if the majority ſo decree, to ſuch inſtitutions: but whether every man in that nation ſhall be ſubject to penalties, for not conforming to ſuch regulation, is a very different thing.

Of the *expediency* of ſupporting the doctrines of religion by a ſtate eſtabliſhment, the evidence of the beſt ages of Chriſtianity gives us no proof. But *if* it be *expedient* to ſupport them, *what* ſupport is the queſtion? Who is to judge of the *expediency?* and *how far* the ſupport is to be afforded, or *the authority* extended? If conſcience muſt bend to authority, the religion of the Son of God would have been long ſince extinguiſhed. The firſt Chriſtians claimed no ſuch ſupport. Admitting that "*irreligion and idolatry provoke the Almighty,*" God is judge alone—this is no farther matter of cognizance to the magiſtrate, than as it diſturbs the peace of civil ſociety. We have more than twenty million of pagan ſubjects in Bengal and the Eaſt, perfectly obedient, and incapable of reſiſtance; ſhall the magiſtrate inflict pains and penalties upon them for idolatry; or, like Theodoſius, put them to death if they ſacrifice? This, brother Milner, he ought to do on your principles. That our own government doth not afford them better means of inſtruction, and prevents the humane and Chriſtian labours of thoſe who would inform them, I will confeſs is highly criminal.

You

You aſk, "May a magiſtrate compel by pains "and penalties to receive a national religion, and "reſtrain others from the exerciſe of his own judg-"ment? would not this encourage perſecution, "and be a tyranny over the conſciences of men?" And, why evade anſwering clearly and diſtinctly your own queſtions? You are compelled to grant, p. 231, what overturns the whole of your argument. You then change the ground, and demand, may a man be allowed "to propagate infidelity "and idolatry?" If at liberty to think for himſelf, he is bound, without diſturbing the peace of ſociety, to communicate what he believes to be true, and fairly ſtate what has produced conviction in his own mind. No man ought to inſult or deride, what the lawful rulers of the ſtate have agreed to maintain; but without inſulting or deriding, may he not peaceably ſtate the opinions, which he thinks will correct error, or remove abuſes. It will reſt with the magiſtrates and the majority of his fellow-citizens to decide, whether *they* will adopt or reject his ſentiments.

The Roman Emperor took a ſhorter way. The pagan who ſacrificed ſuffered death. The Arian had his poſſeſſions confiſcated, and was baniſhed the city. "So did Theodoſius;" and will Mr. Milner call this no compulſion, but ſalutary reſtraint? and deny that this can be called perſecution? In the name of truth, what is perſecution then? Neither the word of God, nor any of the arguments advanced, have proved one of his propoſitions; and I hardly ſuppoſe he will reſt the whole of his proof on the ſolitary text of Job, which he produces. Whatever *utility* be admitted in providing inſtruction for the people in the true religion, does it at all follow, that thoſe who refuſe to be inſtructed, or think another mode preferable, ſhould be puniſhed for ſo doing? Theſe are quite diſtinct ſubjects. Beſides, who is to judge *how far* the puniſhment ſhould reach? What ſhall be the criterion to determine "the tendency to deſtroy the "efficacy of the proviſion made?" Where the civil order is not diſturbed, will it not be more Chriſtian, (and ſurely to a man of Mr. Milner's ſpirit, all that can be worth calling Chriſtianity, ought to bear

bear a different aſpect from eſtabliſhments, or human coercion) will it not, I ſay, be more Chriſtian, and more conducive to every good word and work, to permit the truth to appear in its own divine evidence to the conſcience, without any unhallowed auxiliary, or weapons not of our warfare: and to admit perfect liberty of conſcience even to Turk, Jew, and Infidel? And if *uniformity* be "a chimera of no value," p. 198, why contend for it?

I have a real reverence for revealed religion, and believe there is but *one faith* by which any man can be ſaved. But Mr. Milner's concluſions ſeem not to flow from his premiſes; and the concluſions themſelves are falſe. *True religion* cannot be eſtabliſhed by *poſitive inſtitutions*. It is divine in its origin, and can only be eſtabliſhed by its divine Author. "If the Supreme power has no right, "p. 232, to violate liberty of conſcience;" then it can have no right to "eſtabliſh *true religion* by "poſitive inſtitutions," unleſs, (1) It can produce *infallible* evidences, that *all* its poſitive inſtitutions are *the true religion*. (2) That they are *excluſively*

ſo, and that thoſe who preſume to differ, hold not the *true religion*. And here we have a high way to Rome, which all true Proteſtants have long ſince united to diſclaim.

But if we affect no *infallibility*, then all penal laws to ſupport the fallible deciſions of men in matters that *refer only to the conſcience*, muſt be an inſolent abuſe of power over *Chriſtian liberty*. Will not the whole be more ſcripturally ſettled by permitting every man to ſearch the Scriptures for himſelf? You ſay, p. 233, "in matters of ſubordinate conſequence, which are evidently not "eſſential to Chriſtianity, the civil magiſtrate "ought not to interfere at all." Yet you know, that theſe *ſubordinate, uneſſential* matters, have been the chief object of eſtabliſhments in its *poſitive inſtitutions*. *Epiſcopacy* in England, and *preſbytery* in Scotland, has been as jealouſly guarded by *poſitive inſtitutions*, as the moſt *fundamental articles* of faith. With regard to the puniſhment due, and to be inflicted *on the propagators of opinions held irreligious* by the *eſtabliſhment*, you confeſs, p. 232, *the propoſition undefined and involved in difficulties*.

It

It is aſtoniſhing, that with ſuch acknowledgments, you do not ſee the inextricable maze in which you wander, and the dilemma to which you are reduced: and all to avoid this moſt ſelf-evident and ſcriptural truth, "Leave every man to God, "and his own ſoul." Let every ſociety of Chriſtians preſcribe rules for themſelves, but ſuch as are the voluntary choice of the body; and let them indulge their brethren with the ſame liberty. The beſt of men have been always the victims of penal laws, enacted under pretence of coercing the worſt.

Admit for a moment, that a Bramin among us, ſtated his reaſons for the worſhip of his god Viſhnu, ought he, whilſt a peaceable ſubject, to be puniſhed by the civil magiſtrate? Does he not bear the puniſhment ſuited to his ſtate, in the ignorance and error in which he lives, and for which he is reſponſible to God? Would penal laws convince him? or give leſs weight to his arguments with others? *Sincere Chriſtians*, of whom Mr. Milner ſpeaks, if I know the nature of Chriſtianity, wiſh to

puniſh all who diſpute the divine right of epiſcopacy, the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, the deity of the Son of God, the colour of the coat to be worn in the celebration of divine ſervices, the praying by a liturgy, the doctrine of predeſtination, the rights of patronage or convocation, the neceſſity of a divine change upon the human heart, or the ſupremacy of the Pope or the King, in ſpiritual things?—Oh, brother! *a real Chriſtian* is a man of a different ſtamp, and loving the Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity himſelf, is content to leave every other brother to the ſame word he reads, and to the ſame ſpirit which he hath received; and to uſe or countenance no compulſion, but the ſword of the ſpirit which is the word of God; and *that* wielded, not with magiſterial power or rancorous diſpute, but in love, and in the ſpirit of meekneſs. I am perſuaded this will do more to promote *real Chriſtianity*, than all *poſſible penal eſtabliſhments*.

P. 235. Did eſtabliſhments ever prevent profaneneſs? Look round and judge. Or were dark and barbarous regions enlightened by *them*? Never, but by the zeal of individuals. Indeed eſtabliſhments have always oppoſed every labour of this ſort, unleſs

unleſs done in their own way. Yet even ſhould it be granted that a part of Italy, Spain, or Britain, had continued in irreligion and idolatry, as you preſume, without eſtabliſhments coercive, would they be in deeper darkneſs, or deeper guilt than they are at this day? I trow not.

As to the commencement or progreſs of corruption, whether it began before Conſtantine or after, is nothing to the purpoſe. Can it be proved, that it was *leſs rapid after penal eſtabliſhments took place?* Mr. Milner knows the reverſe is the fact. I do not call *that* Chriſtianity, where power baptiſes nations at the point of the ſword: nor you neither. It is not this Chriſtianity you have developed in the many excellent obſervations you have made in your Church Hiſtory. The corruption of Chriſtianity began with its ſpread under the Apoſtles themſelves: It was impoſſible from the nature of man, but it muſt do ſo. As multitudes entered the Chriſtian pale, profeſſors, not poſſeſſors of Chriſt, the corruption increaſed: as objects of pride, ambition, gain, power, dominion grew up in the Church, it became *more* corrupt. When penal eſtabliſhments, private patronage,

patronage, wealth, dignities, increaſed all theſe, the corruption *arrived at its ſummit.* Every church in proportion as theſe abound, will be the ſame for ever. The Church ever did, and ever will flouriſh moſt, where the temptations to ſeek and enjoy theſe things are leaſt. I appeal to hiſtory, living experience, and your own ſoul. You *aſſert* that, "eſtabliſhments ſtrengthen the hands of ſincere, humbled minded believers;" yet you know, the largeſt number of thoſe, whom *you* think *real Chriſtians*, have always to their coſt experienced this to be untrue.

Can you believe the liturgy ſuch a bulwark againſt falſe doctrine, when you know how few who uſe it believe their own prayers or confeſſions? A ſtrange bulwark! How much more effectual will voluntary aſſociation be found in ſupport of evangelical truth, than compulſive or bribed ſubſcriptions?

Have you yet produced a ſingle argument from Scripture, or experience, why religion ſhould "be "fettered by political inſtitutions?" That *atheiſm ſhould*

ſhould not be tolerated, you ſuppoſe concluſive. And why not tolerated? Do what you will, oaths will be abuſed; look at our courts of juſtice. If there were no laws againſt atheiſm, would there be more glaring and frequent perjury?

Admitting all that France hath done to be never ſo wrong, what is that to the argument? Averſe as I am to their horrible deeds, is there leſs *real Chriſtianity* in France now, than before the revolution? Are the preſent inſtitutions more oppoſite to the power and ſpirit of Chriſtianity than thoſe of the eſtabliſhment of Popery were, which they have deſtroyed? Are they more averſe to the propagation of that *real Chriſtianity* you maintain? I am fully ſure, that a faithful compariſon, and future experience, will demonſtrate the contrary.

There is *no connection* between government and the eſtabliſhment of an excluſive religion, but what a criminal policy has formed. The *alliance between Church and State* has ever been meretricious. In what land have the rulers political ever employed their church power, ſimply to promote *true religion*,

religion, and not political objects? Examine with candour to the preſent moment. Have ſtateſmen ever meant the exaltation of a crucified Jeſus, and a kingdom not of this world? You do not believe it yourſelf.

I can ſee *no ſpiritual benefit* reſulting from this connection; yet I am neither preſbyterian nor independent. After the moſt diligent enquiry, and I think the moſt impartial exerciſe of my beſt judgment, I am an epiſcopalian on conviction, and I hope have fully proved, that the Church had from the beginning men of ſuperior eminence who preſided, by whatever name diſtinguiſhed. I approve highly ſubſcription to articles of religion, that they who miniſter together may have *one faith*. I think a ſound, well digeſted liturgy a real bleſſing, not precluding however free prayer; and I would admit no man to pray or preach, where I had influence, who did not conform to the confeſſion of a triune God, and complete redemption through Jehovah incarnate. But our eſtabliſhment muſt be a voluntary aſſociation; not an object of avarice to procure pecuniary advantages, but the reſult of conviction

conviction of its utility. I abhor the idea of all pains and penalties inflicted on account of religion upon any human being. God forbid I ſhould conſent to ſhed the blood of a poor heathen, becauſe he offers ſacrifice to his idol: or fine or impriſon a miſtaken Arian, becauſe he gathereth not with me. No, I would not touch the hair of the head of a philoſopher, or an atheiſt: it is his miſery to be blind, or a blaſphemer. I will leave the execution of all theſe to the patrons of penal eſtabliſhments: "With ſuch, mine honour, in theſe things, be "not thou united."

It may be ſaid, why then do you belong to an eſtabliſhment with penal laws? I ſhall reply without diſguiſe, they are my averſion; but in the preſent ſtate of imperfection reſpecting every thing human, as an epiſcopalian in ſentiment, I find no other church in this land ſo conformed to my views of evangelical doctrine, as the Church of England; and of all dominant churches none has leſs abuſed its power, or ſhewed a more tolerant ſpirit—but it has abuſed it. The abuſes ſubſiſt. I ſhall freely

remonſtrate againſt them, and rejoice to ſee it without ſpot or blemiſh, or any ſuch thing, but never without biſhops, I wiſh them only to be men of apoſtolic ſtamp and manners.

Mr. Milner ſuppoſes, p. 240, "That without a "ſtate eſtabliſhment, there would be no religion "among us." Why? Did not the true Church from the beginning ſubſiſt without it? Was it to obtain this, the primitive Chriſtians were content to be confeſſors and martyrs? If bigotry can dwell in ſuch minds as Mr. Milner's, what may we not expect from other men? Why ſhould *God ſet his face againſt every government, which does not fence religion with penal ſanctions?* Does not America ſubſiſt without them, a monument of religious peace, I wiſh I could ſay of piety? Yet in the ſcale of piety, I fear, they will fairly weigh againſt us. Muſt the inſtitution be atheiſtical, that leaves men complete toleration, and perfect liberty of conſcience to every individual? Is it poſſible that the feebleſt reaſoner, ſhould ever imagine or connect ſuch a concluſion?

But

But WILL GOD SET HIS FACE AGAINST IT? as you affirm, in Roman capitals. Where does this appear? Has not the government of China ſubſiſted longer than any ſtate of Chriſtendom; not to mention others? Is not atheiſm, or ſomething very like it, the religion of the literati, and idolatry of the vulgar? Has God *confounded* that nation by any peculiar judgments? Does it not ſubſiſt at this day, teeming with an immenſe population, in undiſturbed peace and proſperity? God's government, and his judgments are a great deep. It is in the eternal world he will be ſeen, righteous in all his ways, and juſt in all his works. I am greatly miſtaken, if all that is worth the name of Chriſtianity did not ſubſiſt from the beginning, and in vigour to this day, without the leaſt relation to any eſtabliſhment. And I am ſure as far as pains and penalties have diſgraced any Chriſtian eſtabliſhment, ſo far they have defeated all its profeſſed purpoſes to promote real religion.

P. 241. *Crambe repetita.* Again, who ſhall define what is *fundamental*, and what is *circumſtantial?* Hath it ever yet been done ſatisfactorily? Can it

be done? But you ſay, "*If men would ſeriouſly* "*weigh.*" IF! But what if they will not? Would the laws of the land be leſs effectual for the good order of ſociety, if all eccleſiaſtical pains and penalties were aboliſhed? When the people choſe their own miniſters, before Chriſtianity gained an eſtabliſhment for 300 years, even under pagan tyrants, did not vital Chriſtianity flouriſh more than it has done ſince, without either pain or penalty, except the ſimple excluſion from the voluntary aſſociation? Since biſhops have too generally been the creatures of miniſters, and preſbyters of patrons, have the kingdoms of the world become more the kingdoms of God and of his Chriſt? By whoſe authority hath the primitive model, you yourſelf have deſcribed, been diſregarded?

As to an eſtabliſhment bearing hard on diſſolute men, and correcting their manners by pains and penalties; where did ever an eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhment ſubſiſt, but the morals were diſſolute? Did this ever correct them? Who are the moſt diſſolute? The makers and heads of eſtabliſhments, or the governed? Example will do more than executions.

tions. Do you ſuppoſe any Chriſtian government now ſubſiſting in the world, hath not more infidels and ſceptics, and in high places too, than genuine *believers*, as you and I count *believing*?—As you ſay, "the practical inferences are obvious," but obvious in a ſenſe, the very reverſe of what you would ſuppoſe.

I follow your diviſion of perſons.

1. *The friends of eſtabliſhment.* Such Chriſtianity! Are there no cauſes, but the love of Chriſt, that make men friends to eſtabliſhments? Friend, thou knoweſt better.

2. *Diſſenters, owning fundamentals.* From what then can theſe poſſibly diſſent, that ſhould expoſe them to pains and penalties, from a truly Chriſtian eſtabliſhment?

3. *Infidel diſſenters.* Arian, Socinian, ſhall I add Arminian, or ſhall that not be fundamental? Do infidels care about any eſtabliſhment? Will they not ſubſcribe our creeds and articles without believing a word of them? Do the majority of church-

men give themſelves a thought about the matter? Do the great concern themſelves about any thing, but to keep church powers and dignities as they find them, as moſt conducive to their own political purpoſes? And do thoſe who inflict the pains and penalties, believe one tittle more of the doctrines, or more ſcrupulouſly adhere to the diſcipline, than thoſe whom they affect to puniſh *pro ſalute animæ?* Indeed ſhame of late has palſied the hand of long abuſed power, or fear muzzled the tiger: but no thanks to eſtabliſhments. The ſtatutes of Omri remain unrepealed.

P. 243. You remind me of the maſk in the fable. Is the preſent eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhment ſo beautifully complete, and all its principal limbs models of ſuch Chriſtian perfection? But irony hardly ſuits a ſubject ſo awful. God forbid that magiſtrates ſhould enforce the exiſting laws! I hope never more to ſee high church bigots daring again to oppreſs true Chriſtianity by the rigid execution of penal ſtatutes. Do you wiſh to revive the days of Laud? I know you do not. Vice, hereſy, ſchiſm, and profaneneſs muſt be ſubdued by other weapons, if we would make Chriſtian conqueſts. *Non tali auxilio.*

auxilio. Prove the injury you ſuſtain, appeal to Cæſar, receive damages. Let a jury of twelve good men and true, appreciate them. Will a ſpiritual court afford you a more equitable redreſs, or be more likely to maintain the peace and good order of ſociety?

To be ſure "men ſhould believe the doctrines "they are bound to inculcate." But will this be moſt effectually ſecured by voluntary aſſociations, or penal eſtabliſhments?—*How* an eſtabliſhment ſhall be moſt *wiſely conſtructed*, is the deſideratum. Convoke all the *real Chriſtians* in the land. What would be their ſuffrage? Who would be choſen their church governors? What would be *their eſtabliſhment?* I think ſomething like what you have propoſed in your firſt volume of Church Hiſtory. But, brother, you and I ſhould be left diſſenters in a ſad minority, if not thinking with the multitude of great and little Chriſtians around us, who have all the power, conſtitutes a diſſenſion. And the church eſtabliſhment, you and I ſhould form, would have no pains and penalties, but the primitive ones,

admonition—repeated—and if diſregarded—exclu-ſion from the ſociety of the faithful. Whatever goes farther than this, has no divine warrant for us to follow.

P. 244. Your ideas are utopian, and at the ſame time contradictory to all you advance. Suppoſe, what is a very ſuppoſable caſe, ſuch an antichriſtian government as you mention, eſtabliſhed by the majority of any country. Who ſhall judge *the wickedneſs of the heart* of thoſe who do it, but God only? Are the minority juſtified in *reſiſting* ſuch authority? Have they a claim beyond toleration and peace? Elſe where are your paſſive principles ſo often inculcated to the powers that be? Is an heterodox Chriſtian governor to be reſiſted, and Nero to be obeyed?—Leave governors of ſtates, who ſupport falſe religion, where they ought to be left, to the judgments of God. But if theſe fall heavy on *their* heads, what will be the caſe with civil and eccleſiaſtical governors who ſupport an eſtabliſhment, the fundamental articles of which the greater part no more believe, than the perſons it

it cenſures? Nay, aſtoniſhing to tell! the moſt conſcientious preachers of the doctrines of that eſtabliſhment fall the firſt under their rebukes, for believing and acting as that very eſtabliſhment preſcribes. For whatever be the pretext employed, the real offence is believing and preaching the doctrines with zeal *in ſeaſon out of ſeaſon*. You and I know ſuch an eſtabliſhment.

P. 245. To be ſure. You and I do ſo now—we ſhould do the ſame under Nero or Conſtantius. "Reſolutely ſpread the Goſpel, and be content to "ſuffer." Under the preſent eſtabliſhment the doctrines of which we approve, and to the liturgy of which, with ſome ſmall alterations and ſhortenings, not at all affecting its ſubſtance, we accede, yet from the abuſes inſeparable from all eſtabliſhments of Church and State united, we feel, that whilſt unchriſtian men rule, and rule they muſt, whilſt political maxims diſpoſe of all preferments in the Church, even ſuppoſing our own the beſt of all poſſible penal and coercive eſtabliſhments, yet that beſt is worſe than none. Conſcience and conſent, not penalties, ſhould form real Chriſtian union.

I truſt

I truſt I have now proved to the ſatisfaction of every true Chriſtian, that the propoſitions you ſet out with, are utterly unfounded, and the very reverſe of them, truth. "That Theodoſius had *no* "right to make his religion, that of the ſtate uni- "verſally, with pains and penalties on the diſſenters "from his impoſitions.—That every man in this "matter is to be left to his own conſcience, undiſ- "turbed, as long as he is a peaceable ſubject— "That it is an unwarranted violation of the right "of private judgment to impoſe religious ſenti- "ments on the ſubjects of any government, with "pains and penalties for non-conformity—and "that therefore Theodoſius, and all others who "have acted like him, are chargeable with a crimi- "nal abuſe of authority." All which poſitions I truſt I have left no longer "INVOLVED IN DIFFI- "CULTIES."

DISSER-

DISSERTATION II.

ON SCHISM.

AS moſt formal and dead profeſſors are ſtrongly attached to the ſhibboleth of party, and ſtudious to place under ſome opprobrious name, the faithful and ſpiritual minded, who witneſs againſt their ignorance and bigotry, I wiſh to conſider, what is the true ſcriptural idea of ſchiſm, and who are the ſchiſmatical, and the ſchiſm makers.

Schiſm, or diviſion, as applied to Chriſtians, is the ſeparation of one body of profeſſing Chriſtians from another, on whatever cauſe it may have ariſen; and uſually is underſtood in a criminal ſenſe, as originating in a proud, factious ſpirit, and deſtitute of juſtifiable grounds of ſeparation.

It will therefore be neceſſary to define the eſſence of a true Church, in order to diſcern when, and in

in what caſes ſeparation from thoſe with whom we have been formerly joined, is not only juſtifiable, but abſolutely neceſſary, according to the Scripture.

The paſſions and the prejudices of men are ready to darken their underſtanding, and to prevent a candid enquiry. Every man is diſpoſed to erect himſelf into an infallible judge, and the church to which he attaches himſelf, as excluſively the only true Church; and thus to look upon thoſe, who join not in his opinions as deluded and miſtaken; and ſometimes, nay, too frequently, this proceeds to all the aſperity of anathemas; and not only thoſe who differ from us are rejected from the title of brethren, but their ordinations invalidated, their baptiſms diſallowed, and their Chriſtianity, if not abſolutely denied, regarded as very equivocal. Till we can come to happier unity of ſpirit, and thence to a nearer uniformity of ſentiment, candor and mutual forbearance will become us all. It is not in the colliſion of angry diſputants, that the truth as it is in Jeſus, is to be ſought, but in a humble

ſenſe

ſenſe of our limited capacities, and in earneſt ſupplication to the Father of lights, to lead us into all truth.

Reſpecting a true Church, I do not know a more liberal and genuine definition, than is given by the Church of England.

The Church is "a ſociety of faithful people, "where the word of God is truly preached, and "the ſacraments duly miniſtred." I ſhall leave bigots to diſpute about modes and forms, and adhere to the ſubſtantial parts of a true Church, according to this definition, and then conſider what ſeparation from particular churches, conſtitutes ſchiſm as criminal.

As the Church is the body of Chriſt, the members muſt be joined to him in one ſpirit. This is the firſt and eſſential characteriſtic. He has only a name to live and is dead, who is deſtitute of the mind of Chriſt. To be a *faithful* people, called to be *ſaints*, is the only criterion of a true Church. Where this requiſite is not found, no ſociety can

can claim to be a Chriſtian Church, but muſt be the ſynagogue of Satan, and whatever name it bears, it is anti-chriſtian.

True Chriſtianity is neceſſarily ſocial. They who love one another out of a pure heart fervently, naturally unite; and as worſhip of their Lord, and communion with each other, is felt as their delight as much as duty, therefore prayer and praiſe, edifying diſcourſe, and fraternal communications, form a bond of aſſociation, which is every day preparing them for the company and inheritance of the ſaints in light.

This ſociety of faithful people is peculiarly careful to hold faſt the faith once delivered to the ſaints; and, therefore, their firſt concern is, to procure the *word of God* to be TRULY preached among them. As they are a ſociety, ſome fundamental articles of faith muſt neceſſarily be the bond of their union in which they agree, and the purity of which they jealouſly maintain among themſelves: and whatever ſuch church, or ſuch ſociety have agreed upon, they have a right to enforce

force as the terms of communion; and if the minister ceases to preach such doctrine, or to present a suitable example correspondent therewith, then that society, and every faithful individual of it, is, by the Scripture, bound to withdraw himself from such erroneous pastor or teacher, when his dismissal cannot otherwise be obtained. This voluntary agreement in fundamental articles, infringes no right of private judgment. Every man, as an individual, may change his mind and withdraw; but during such union, if any teacher bring another doctrine, we are not to bid him God speed; but contrarily from such withdraw thyself. And what God hath commanded can be no schism, in any criminal sense.

The *due* administration of the sacraments, baptism and the supper of the Lord, is essential, as the connecting bond of outward union; and whatever be the mode of the administration, about which so many disputes have arisen, this surely can be but a subordinate consideration, whilst the divine institutions are observed.

These

Theſe conſiderations being premiſed, it will be more eaſily diſcerned, who makes the ſchiſm, and who are the ſchiſmatical, whenever diviſions enſue.

In every church, whether conſtituted of aggregate congregations, or confined to one individual ſociety, each of the aggregate congregations is in the ſame ſituation as the individual ſociety. And if originally every biſhop had but one pariſh, as King urges, within his ſuperintendence, or as I have endeavoured to prove, beſides his own peculiar cure, a ſuperintending care of the preſbyters, and the churches eſtabliſhed in his town or vicinage, in either caſe the claim of the people on their own paſtor, preſbyter, or biſhop, was the ſame. The eſſential conſtitution of every church, ſingle or aggregate, is, that "the word of God ſhould "be truly preached among a ſociety of faithful "people;" and wherever this ceaſed to be the caſe, there ſeparation became duty.

1. If the paſtor, preſbyter, or biſhop, is not a true preacher of God's word, according to the doctrines eſtabliſhed in the ſociety of faithful people

ple where he miniſters, the diſciples muſt be ſeparated from him.

Reduce the eſſential doctrines to as few as poſſible; I apprehend in every Chriſtian Church, which can truly deſerve that name, that two at leaſt will be eſteemed fundamental. 1. The compleat atonement made by the offering of the great ſacrifice, God and Man in one Chriſt. And, 2dly, The neceſſity of a divine change, by the real influence, and communication of the Holy Ghoſt, as a divine perſon, producing a new heart and a right ſpirit, in thoſe who in and of themſelves can do no good thing.

I confine myſelf to theſe, the cleareſt, and moſt important points of Chriſtian doctrine, admitted as of eſſential conſequence by every orthodox ſociety of Chriſtians which has yet been formed.

Therefore, if ſuch paſtor, preſbyter, or biſhop, as preſides in the church to which I belong, deny theſe fundamental doctrines: or in his preaching enters not into them; but manifeſts he neither be-

lieves them himſelf, nor wiſhes to edify his ſociety of faithful people in them—whatever authority hath appointed ſuch perſon over them, the faithful people are bound to withdraw themſelves from him, and to procure ſuch a one as ſhall preach to them the true word of God, according to the fundamental Chriſtian doctrines: and there is no ſchiſm in ſuch a diviſion from an unſound teacher: but he who occaſions the ſeparation is the criminal perſon.

2. It was admitted in all the primitive churches, that immoral conduct, and negligence of the flock, were juſt cauſes for rejecting ſuch unfaithful biſhop, paſtor, or preſbyter; and that the Scripture no where ſuggeſts the idea of indelible character, or that any man, by whatever authority conſtituted, can be a miniſter of Chriſt, when he hath denied the faith in his teaching, and diſhonoured it by his practice.

I ſhall not enter into minute diſcuſſions reſpecting the proof neceſſary. Facts of this kind uſually carry with them no dubious evidence; and if the evidence

evidence be dubious, charity hopeth all things; but if no doubt remains in my mind of what I have an opportunity of obſerving every day; if inſtead of a laborious preacher of God's holy word, and an ornamental walk in the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, the reverſe is the fact, whether attended with groſſer immoralities or not, I am in duty bound to withdraw myſelf from ſuch, both for my own ſoul's good, and to bear a faithful teſtimony for the ſake of my brethren. And where no factious, proud, or contentious ſpirit is the ground of ſeparation, but a full conviction of facts, determining my conſcience in the deciſion, there no ſchiſm can be juſtly chargeable; contrariwiſe, ſuch a faithful confeſſion, the great Head of the Church will honour, in obedience to whom, we come out, and ſeparate, and touch not the unclean thing.

I enter not here into the conſideration, which among the churches of Chriſtendom is the beſt conſtituted in its model, and moſt apoſtolical in its adminiſtration. If I belong to the beſt aggregate ſociety originally, into which corruption of

principle and practice has entered, ſo as to infect the teacher where I am ſituated, my duty is to quit ſuch teacher, and ſuch ſociety as maintains communion with him, and to ſeek the fundamentals of a true Church wherever I can find them, and to join with that, in which, according to the beſt of my knowledge, the word of God is preached in greateſt purity, and adorned in the practice of the biſhop, preſbyter, or paſtor, with his congregation in greateſt ſpirituality.

Many differences of opinions and modes of worſhip, may admit intercommunion—and all haſty and needleſs diviſions are to be guarded againſt, as productive of the worſt conſequences. But where fundamentals are loſt, and only names and forms remain, there we can have no fellowſhip, and the word of God commands open ſeparation and avowal of the cauſe.

DISSER-

DISSERTATION III.

ON INFIDELITY.

REMARKS ON MR. GIBBON'S FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CHAPTERS, ON THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

AS I have been obliged in the courſe of my enquiries to examine carefully the celebrated Gibbon, I know no more proper place for the introduction of my remarks, than the cloſe of this century, when Chriſtianity completely triumphant over heatheniſm, and its philoſophical abettors, had nearly expelled it from the bounds of the Roman empire; and ſpread its victorious banners alſo over the moſt diſtant nations, beyond the Roman pale. The envenomed and inſidious attacks of the moſt admired writers againſt Chriſtianity in the preſent age, are well known. Some of them have already developed the fatal effects of their philoſophical religion; and turned thoſe very perſecutors, againſt which their cry was ſo loud and ſo violent. Vol-

taire, Rouſſeau, and others, have, indeed, proved very ſucceſsful apoſtles of infidelity, impiety, and impurity. Mr. Gibbon ranks among the firſt of their converts, and the moſt zealous for propagating their faith, or no faith, ſhall I ſay—though, to ſpeak accurately, they are wondrous believers, and their credulity, in all that regards infidelity, is among the ſtriking traits of their character. In all their arguing againſt Chriſtianity, they are compelled to reject evidence, and draw concluſions, infinitely more oppoſite to all the allowed axioms of credibility and teſtimony, than any thing chargable on the facts they would impeach, or the perſons they would depreciate. Glory to God, the truth as it is in Jeſus, defies the impotent attacks of its moſt envenomed adverſaries.

Affecting the greateſt candor, and profeſſing to appeal to authority, (not always admiſſible,) Meſſrs. Gibbon, Hume, and others, as eminent for their abilities, as diſtinguiſhed by their enmity againſt every thing which Chriſtians hold ſacred, have endeavoured to undermine the foundations of their hope, and to brand revelation as impoſ-

ture.

ture. And I have no doubt, that however aſſured they never did, nor ever will make one convert to their principles from *real Chriſtianity*; yet, among the herd of *nominal Chriſtians* their ſucceſs will be ample. Where men are Chriſtians merely becauſe it is the religion of their country, adopted under the prejudices of education, and held merely in name and form, inſtead of power, and much aſſurance of its divine origin, I marvel not that the ſophiſms, ridicule, and unfair repreſentations of infidel writers, ſet forth in the moſt agreeable ſtile, ſhould produce abundant effects: and be peculiarly welcome to men of congenial minds and manners, who cannot but *wiſh* to be perſuaded, that all thoſe awful declarations of the word of God may be *falſe*, which muſt be their eternal condemnation if admitted to be *true*. They cannot therefore but naturally deſire to emancipate themſelves from the bondage which a guilty conſcience brings, and to give a freer ſcope to the indulgences which a corrupted nature craves, without being ſubject to a fearful looking for of judgment, the terrible wrath of God *revealed* from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs

of men. They try to perſuade themſelves that all reſponſibility to the great Judge of quick and dead is a chimera—that body and ſoul have the ſame period of exiſtence, and that like the beaſts of the field we periſh and are extinct—that every man who is tired of life has a perfect right to put an end to it—that after death all is darkneſs and eternal ſleep. Such principles, however philoſophical, however ably ſupported by theſe ingenious men, and however deſirable they may appear to thoſe who wiſh their own utter extinction, becauſe they dread an exiſtence beyond the grave; yet, to men of a plain capacity as I am, and who am not aſhamed to confeſs my hope and deſire of immortality with God my Saviour in glory everlaſting; theſe opinions, far from conveying conſolatory truths, or carrying with them conviction to the mind, we cannot but deplore as errors the moſt fatal to mankind, and doctrines of devils, whoſe tendency leads as ſurely to the diſſolution of every bond which moſt ſtrongly cements ſociety together; as to the miſery, ruin, and deſpair of every individual: whoſe proſpects muſt be wretched indeed, if annihilation is the beſt of their expectations. For the painful ſomething within, that

that cannot wholly be extinguiſhed, will at leaſt raiſe ſad ſuſpicion and miſgivings, and even in the moſt hardy infidel, I believe, ſpeak ſometimes in ſenſations that cannot eaſily be appeaſed: but, admitting the conſcience perfectly cauteriſed, and that inſenſibility which they covet actually poſſeſſed, theſe men are ſurely in no enviable ſituation. Even according to the dictates of common ſenſe, any hope, even though fallacious, is preferable to the deſpair of gloomy infidelity, as during its exerciſe, it affords at leaſt a pleaſing and ſalutary deluſion. But the hope of the Goſpel is no cunningly deviſed fable. Let every thing our adverſaries can produce ſtand forth in open day, we are ready to meet them; and we hope in point of abilities or argument, ſhall not be found their inferiors, notwithſtanding their affected contempt of the groveling votaries of revelation. Conſcious that "the fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than men, "and the weakneſs of God is ſtronger than men," we dare leave the divine truth which we produce, to reſt on its own eternal baſis, and to repel the rude aſſaults of its moſt envenomed opponents.

Indeed,

Indeed, the writings of Mr. Gibbon, eſpecially his poſthumous works, afford, like the tail of the rattleſnake, a warning againſt his bite, and an antidote for his poiſon. A man openly blaſpheming the name of God, and offenſively profane in print, avowedly intemperate, and not aſhamed to gibbet himſelf as ſold to a miniſter for a place or a penſion, can, with an ill grace, revile Chriſtianity, and vaunt his heathen ethics. And what muſt ſtrike the moſt inattentive reader, the diſguſting impurity of his repeated quotations, on which he appears to dwell with ſuch delight, debaſes the dignity of the hiſtoric page, and holds up to contempt and abhorrence, a mind utterly viſiated, and brutiſhly corrupt. Indeed, I believe, it will be always found, that wherever a man ſets his wits at work to revile the religion of the Son of God, his temper and conduct will demonſtrate as flagrant a violation of all the Goſpel precepts, as the bitterneſs of his enmity will betray itſelf in his oppoſition to the Goſpel doctrines.

How Profeſſor Robertſon and others could meanly incenſe ſuch men as theſe, ſenſible of the impurity

impurity and impiety which breathe in their writings, is an awful and mortifying evidence how little the ſpirit of truth influences many, who call themſelves Chriſtian men, and even profeſs to be Chriſtian miniſters. Surely againſt all ſuch, our indignation is juſt. But whilſt falſe profeſſors have baſely betrayed the intereſts of Chriſtianity, her real, but imprudent friends have often done much harm to the cauſe, which they meant to defend. They have taken untenable ground, and ſuppoſed they could convince infidels by reaſoning with them on their own principles. Thus elaborate defences of Chriſtianity, and apologies for the Bible, with great evidence of learning, and critical acumen have appeared; but did theſe ever convince one infidel, or make him a real convert to Goſpel truth?—I trow not. The ſtrong fortreſs of the corrupted heart muſt be aſſaulted with weapons of another temper, by the ſword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. Till the divine grace open the underſtanding to underſtand the Scriptures, all the mighty arguments of theological polemics will leave men juſt as it found them, groping

ing

ing for the wall as blind. And the theologians themſelves, however acute logicians, deep in metaphyſics or mathematics, and verſed in all the learned lore, if not *taught of God*, will know nothing of *real Chriſtianity* as they ought to know. Yet it is not the leſs true, that Chriſtianity, though not founded on argument, nor ſtanding in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God, is attended with *moral evidence* of a nature ſo luminous, and facts ſo well ſubſtantiated, as to leave thoſe utterly without excuſe who "neglect ſo great ſalvation, "which began firſt to be ſpoken by the Lord, and "was confirmed to us by thoſe who heard him." The light ſhineth in darkneſs, and the darkneſs comprehendeth it not, becauſe the heart is in fault. Men hate the light, neither come unto the light, becauſe their deeds are evil. In point of evidence, the Goſpel challenges enquiry into its divine authority, and preſents a ſeries of facts and witneſſes, which the farther they are traced, lead to the ſtrongeſt *moral demonſtration*, that *it is impoſſible Chriſtianity ſhould not be true*. But a man even *thus* convinced, is only *almoſt*, not *altogether Chriſtian*. He receives it as the *magis probabile*, (the

moſt

moſt probable,) like Cicero's tuſculan queſtions; but a new and more ingenious ſophiſt brings him back again to ſcepticiſm, till he has repeated the proceſs, if he happens to be capable of doing it, and ſifted out all the new fallacies of reaſoning, perverſion of evidence, or definition of terms. A ſhorter method is revealed in the holy book, and that, which alone can change the reed for the rock, when the divine teſtimony really enters the conſcience, "in power and in the Holy Ghoſt, "and in much aſſurance."

The Scriptures of truth, wherein holy men ſpake, as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt, carry the ſtamp of divinity upon them. Though the proud reaſoner ſays, "Are we blind alſo?" And the corruption of the human heart, like the ſcuttle fiſh, emits the black juice, which darkens the medium, through which the beams of truth cannot enter. Theſe Scriptures have deſcended to us unimpaired, amidſt the unfaithful depoſitaries with whom they have been often entruſted, and the polluted channels of traditions, which have attempted to blur the leaves. The very diviſions of the

the Church, amidſt all other evils, have produced this good. So many were watching each other's halting, that attempts to falſify would have turned to the confuſion and diſgrace of the fraudulent. To a real Chriſtian they bring with them a demonſtration of their ſpirit and power, and their divine original is concluſively evidenced, in the divine influence which ſtill attends them. Theſe oracles of God are to be ſimply produced—to them we muſt make our appeal—to the word, and to the teſtimony. Infidels have never entered into the nature of real Chriſtianity. A church which Chriſt diſowns, has been the butt of their ridicule, and abuſes *unchriſtian* have given the weight to their arguments. When we go to eccleſiaſtical hiſtorians, and produce fathers and confeſſors, we are in danger of quitting the ſacred ground, and of giving the adverſary the advantage, for which they had been manœuvring. Much evil, mingled with much good in the very earlieſt days of Chriſtianity, as I have admitted, and ſhewn. The myſtery of iniquity began already to work, even in the time of the apoſtles, in pride, contention and worldly-mindedneſs: but the Church of Chriſt is inde-

independent of men, and needs no ſupport from human authority, any more than it reſts on the falſe miracles and ſuperſtitions with which it hath been diſgraced in the lives and writings of ſome of its profeſſors, and againſt which infidels directing their artillery, have borne off their impotent trophies. The foundation of God ſtandeth ſure.

The 15th and 16th chapters of Mr. Gibbon's Hiſtory of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, concentrate all his arguments againſt the religion of Jeſus. Ingenious and inſidious as they appear, I have read them with attention, and I hope without undue prejudice to the argument, however evidently convinced of the wickedneſs of the man; and I may venture to aſſert, that no real Chriſtian need be apprehenſive of any dangerous effects from ſuch unfair ſtatements, and malicious inſinuations. His ignorance of the truly Chriſtian character which is the ſubject of his contempt, diſarms the malignity of his ſuggeſtions; and his attempts to depreciate the Goſpel of Chriſt, diſcovers how little he is acquainted with the real dignity of our nature, and the means which can only

only enoble it. I have attentively followed him through the mazes of ſly inſinuation and treacherous commendation, and am perſuaded the more the grounds of his charges are examined the leſs force will they have to ſhake our confidences.

The herd of nominal Chriſtians who live without Chriſt in the world eagerly embrace infidelity as a refuge; and however ſlow of heart to believe all that prophets and apoſtles have ſpoken, are abundantly *credulous* reſpecting theſe new philoſophic miſſionaries. They ſwallow down with avidity the deſirable ſuggeſtions of annihilation and impunity. Enchanted with the brilliant ſtile of a Gibbon or a Voltaire, they miſtake the corruſcations of wit for argument, and the ſallies of ridicule as the infallible teſt of truth. But theſe ſhafts pierce not the ſhield of a real Chriſtian's faith: they ſerve only to ſtrengthen his confidence, whilſt he ſees the impotence of his foes. He is founded on the rock of ages.

I have carefully peruſed the elegant hiſtorian, and among a multitude of miſrepreſentations, I have

have ſelected a few as evidence, how little credit is to be paid to his ſtatements, reſpecting *real Chriſtianity*, the nature of which he certainly never underſtood.

1. It is not true, that *faith* is *the only merit of a Chriſtian.* It never was eſteemed *meritorious*, in any age, by real Chriſtians. They have ever diſclaimed all idea of merit. They have always acknowledged their faith to be *the gift of God.* *Merit* in creature, their whole ſyſtem utterly diſowns.

2. It is not true, that *moral virtues may be equally practiſed by infidels.* The very reverſe is the Scripture doctrine: it teaches, that deſtitute of the divine principle of *faith, which worketh by love,* there is nothing but evil in the human heart and practice—that the appearances of moral virtue, without this are merely ſpecious and deluſive; and only what our article deſcribes them, *ſplendida peccata,* ſplendid iniquities, originating in no divine principle; not performed according to the divine order; nor deſigned, nor tending to advance the divine glory.

They who would confute the ſacred oracles, and the faith once delivered to the ſaints, ſhould underſtand them. Where the ſuppoſition on which a man argues is falſe, all the poignancy of ridicule cannot make it true.

3. If *we celebrate the ſanctity of our anceſtors*, it is not that we ſuppoſe, that ſaints only exiſted in primitive times; and that there are not ſuch as really at preſent, and probably in as conſiderable a number, as in any age of Chriſtianity. *Their preſent ſucceſſors are not degenerate.* Every *real Chriſtian* is the ſame in every age. The ſaints of old were not *more pure*: and as to their being *more auſtere*, I apprehend vital Chriſtianity, ancient or modern, alike diſclaimed, whatever was contrary to the amiable ſimplicity of truth. But in ſome men's eyes all genuine purity wears the forbidding garb of auſterity; and cannot but do ſo, till they have known by experience that Chriſt's yoke is eaſy, and his burden light.

4. The *reproach*, whether *ancient* or modern, that *the moſt atrocious criminals*, and perſons *very wicked*, were

were the propereſt ſubjects for Chriſtianity, in preference to thoſe who had followed the *dictates of benevolence and propriety*, is demonſtrative of the deepeſt ignorance, and perverſion of the Scripture doctrine; and proves how much the wiſe man reſembles the vulgar, in the apprehenſion of Goſpel truth. Becauſe it is affirmed, that every man alike *needs* the remedy which the Scripture reveals, and that it is equally *free* for the chief of ſinners, does it follow that we ſhould "do evil that good may "come?" The Apoſtle foreſaw ſuch ſlanders would be reported, and ſuch inferences drawn, and meets them with an awful warning, Rom. iii. 8. *Whoſe damnation is juſt.* If by a *life of penitence*, Mr. Gibbon would infer *a life of penance*, ſuch as monkiſh abuſe introduced, and that ſuch *perfection* was the *ruling paſſion*, he miſtakes the practice of real Chriſtianity. Error receives no conſecration from its antiquity.

I will take the confeſſion of an adverſary, and beg him to produce among all his infidel acquaintance a portrait ſo honourable to every thing truly dignified in humanity, as he confeſſes the character

of the Chriſtian to have been—"Averſe to the "gay luxuries of the age; inured to chaſtity, tem- "perance, œconomy, and all the ſober and do- "meſtic virtues. With the ſtricteſt integrity, and "the faireſt dealing even above ſuſpicion: humble, "meek, patient: adhering more cloſely to each "other in perſecution: admired by the infidels "around them for their mutual charity, and un- "ſuſpecting confidence." That any man ſhould treat ſuch characters with contempt, and turn them into ridicule, can give us but a very mean opinion of his own. To aſcribe ſuch conduct to a pride of *reputation*, for the *honour of their ſect*, is highly uncandid and diſingenuous. Is Mr. Gibbon a diſcerner of ſpirits?

That their *conduct* was thus admirably exemplary, and their *ſufferings* inexpreſſibly great, even their pagan and infidel revilers are compelled to admit, to whatever cauſe they are pleaſed to aſcribe theſe things. Nor can there be a ſtronger proof of a divine energy and original than this—that ſo vaſt a body of men—ſo immenſely diſperſed—with every worldly inducement to pervert them from the purity

of

of the faith—expoſed to the contempt and ridicule of the wiſe—and expecting every torment which diabolical malice and tyranny could invent—that, as is confeſſed, ſuch men aſſociated for purpoſes ſo bleſſed, is in my view a miracle greater than the inverſion of the ordinary courſe of nature, on any particular occaſion. And all that is advanced by the ſpirit of infidel philoſophy to depreciate ſuch tranſcendent excellence, ſtrongly reminds me of Satan in Milton, turning from the glorious luminary of day, " to tell thee how I hate thy beams." Chriſtians acted under the influence of principles, as tranſcendently above all ancient or modern ſyſtems of *morals*, as revelation is ſuperior to fallacious reaſoning, and certitude to conjecture. The divine principle of faith working by love, philoſophy is as little capable of appreciating as of comprehending.

5. As untrue is the aſſertion, that Chriſtians in *this* world *were not deſirous of making themſelves agreeable or uſeful*—the reverſe *neceſſarily follows* from their above admitted character. They enjoyed in this world greater comfort, were more

agreeable ſociety, and communicated *greater bleſſings* to all around them, than the moſt voluptuous, or the moſt philoſophic: and they continue to do ſo.

The deſcription of their ſelf-denial is in many inſtances exaggerated, and caricatured. And where monkiſh and ſelf-ordained mortifications prevailed, as it is to be lamented they often did, with innumerable abuſes, it was not Chriſtianity, but ſome of its miſtaken profeſſors who were to be blamed. They who underſtood the Scriptures, and followed the examples of the Apoſtles and firſt diſciples of Jeſus, though avowedly, and jealouſly ſeparating themſelves from this preſent evil world, and every thing earthly, ſenſual, and deviliſh in it: yet uſed the world, without abuſing it. They regarded what they held in providence, as *given them* in *all things richly to enjoy*—They *lived joyfully with the wife of their youth*—They eat their meals *with joy and gladneſs*—and uſed *wine* in a temperate manner. All *public places* indeed, where impurity and impiety were eſtabliſhed by law, they avoided. The ſcenes of riot and feſtivity, which others coveted and ſought, gave them no delight. They could not

not drink a chearful glaſs with the philoſopher; laugh at the *bon mot* or *double entendre*; or enjoy the quotation of broad impurity, provided it was wrapped up in a foreign language. The things in which a liberal philoſophic mind indulged they then, as we now, regarded with grief and abhorrence; but they were not the leſs happy, or *agreeable* on this account. Their enjoyments were of a nobler kind, and procured more ſubſtantial and real bleſſedneſs, ſuch as the world could not give, and was equally unable to take away.

In uſeleſs extravagance of dreſs or furniture, it was impoſſible they ſhould find pleaſure, who had ſo much more delightful an employment for their ſuperfluities: eſpecially at a time when the ſufferings and diſtreſſes of their brethren called forth every exertion for their relief. Indeed the very ſelf-denial which enabled them for theſe noble acts of Chriſtian charity, muſt have communicated the moſt pleaſing of all ſenſations. I will allow a cold-hearted ſelf-indulgent and philoſophic man, who is *no Chriſtian*, to ridicule or deſpiſe what he hath never felt nor can conceive. They have their

puniſhment already in the loſs of a pleaſure, which they have no capacity to enjoy: even *the delight of doing good*, upon the noble principle of fraternal affection, kindled "by the love of God, ſhed abroad "in our hearts through the Holy Ghoſt given "unto us."

I certainly am not one of Mr. Gibbon's *unfeeling candidates for heaven.* I am perſuaded the true Chriſtian never ſaw any thing in the Scripture which forbad him to admire the beautiful gate of the temple, or the harmony of ſound with which the ſervice was attended. Our Lord and his diſciples conſtantly reſorted thither. They ſang themſelves, and often, as is recorded: and this is marked as a prominent feature in the primitive Chriſtian worſhip. Inſtead of prohibition, we are commanded to ſpeak one to another in pſalms, and hymns, and ſpiritual ſongs, ſinging and making melody in our hearts unto the Lord. And inſtrumental muſic has not a ſingle ſyllable againſt it in the New Teſtament, as we know it was the habitual practice of the old. That Chriſtians abhorred the bacchanalian chorus, or the impure odes to Venus, and

and her votaries Lydia or Chloe; that they ſhould refuſe to mix with ſingers and dancers, and ſtage players, is not to be wondered. They had better company in the communion of ſaints, and purer delights in the ſongs of Zion.

If ſome, like Tertullian or Origen, abſurdly preſumed to condemn what the Scripture hath no where forbidden, the miſtakes of ſuch men are no more to be imputed to Chriſtianity, than the fooleries of St. Anthony or Pope Pius.

6. It is not true, that *the virtue of the primitive Chriſtians was guarded by poverty and ignorance.* In fact, poverty and ignorance never made men more *virtuous.* Look at the inferior ranks of life in any country; you would hardly from them take your models of *virtue.* But in fact, the ſuppoſition itſelf is contrary to truth. Every *real* Chriſtian muſt have been *leſs poor* and *leſs ignorant,* as it is now, than thoſe of his own condition in life. The very Scriptures to which they attended, and their mutual deſire of edification, did then as ever, make thoſe who were Chriſtians indeed a far better informed

ſet

ſet of perſons than any around them. It is the ſame at this day, the body of *real Chriſtians*, who are chiefly found among the inferior ranks of life, are abundantly ſuperior in knowledge to thoſe in their own ſtation. And as to their *poverty*, it is evident, from Mr. Gibbon himſelf, that they were the moſt induſtrious and retired; enemies to diſſipation and luxury; and therefore, they *muſt have earned more*, and *waſted leſs*, than others of the ſame rank or profeſſion. And it is experimentally demonſtrable this muſt have been the caſe, elſe they could not have ſo often and ſo largely contributed to the relief of their brethren, and frequently of their enemies. Nor could they have gained from heathens themſelves ſuch praiſe for charity and liberality, if their induſtry and prudence had not enriched them. It is the ſame this day: there is *more knowledge* and *leſs want* among *real Chriſtians* than among others in ſimilar ſtations of life.

7. I except to many of the fathers, as the oracles of *Chriſtian chaſtity*. And Mr. Gibbon's highly charged canvas exhibits no portrait, reſembling what is deſcribed in the Scriptures of truth, or exemplified

emplified in the lives of the Apoſtles and their diſciples. I am ready to acknowledge and lament, that falſehood and folly too early crept into the profeſſing Church; but we vindicate no abuſes, nor could they poſſibly contribute to the ſpread of *real* Chriſtianity. It is diſingenuous to quote abuſes as Chriſtian practices, and ſuch men as Origen as examples. Chaſtity is among the firſt of Chriſtian duties. The rules for it are in the Scripture explicit and clear. Marriage was not *tolerated* as a defect, but enjoined as honourable for *all.* It could not be conſidered as degrading, when the firſt of the apoſtles, and the brethren of the Lord, led about with them, a wife, a ſiſter, as their faithful and conſtant companion. The whole circle of revelation affords no inſtances of forbidding to marry, nor of the unlawfulneſs of ſecond marriages; but expreſsly enjoins the younger widows to marry, and not affect a ſtate which might be dangerous to their virtue. But as the impediments of a family would be very great in the way of itinerant evangeliſts; and in days of perſecution, the anxieties about theſe tender relatives much encreaſed: theſe were ſtated, as reaſons to thoſe ſo circum-

circumſtanced, for the preference of a ſingle life. The advantages and diſadvantages in their preſent ſituation, were compared, without laying unneceſſary reſtraint, or putting a ſnare in the way of the diſciples.

As to the *merit of the ſacrifice*, Mr. Gibbon muſt underſtand very little of the revelation of God, if he ſuppoſes the idea of *merit* entered ever into a *real* Chriſtian's view; and thoſe fathers who could urge ſuch a conſideration, could know little more of true Chriſtianity than the pagans themſelves.

8. It is not true, that *the loſs of ſenſual pleaſure* was ſupplied, and compenſated by *ſpiritual pride*. I apprehend no evidence of this can be adduced, as originating in any principle of Chriſtianity, or deducible from the practice of any, who deſerved the name of Chriſtians. *Pride* of every ſort ſtands in Scripture marked with the brand of reprobacy, eſpecially ſpiritual pride; they muſt be unworthy of the name of Chriſtian who could indulge the one or the other. Thoſe who were thus chargeable, exhibited no feature of primitive Chriſtianity.

The

The Church is not to be ſought in the herd of profeſſors, but in the few faithful.

The caricature of Chriſtianity would naturally catch the ridicule of the philoſopher; but the extravagancies or follies here noticed, prove only how ſoon deluſions ſpread. The *true Chriſtian* was ever a man of a different ſpirit. Gnoſticiſm and Origeniſm were no more Chriſtianity at that day, than monkery and popery are Chriſtianity now. I may add, I hope not invidiouſly, that a philoſophic batchelor, whoſe principles reſtrained him from no *ſenſual pleaſures*, will be allowed but a moderate judge of Chriſtian purity.

9. It is not true that *Chriſtians were averſe to buſineſs*. Their induſtry as well as temperance, was by Mr. Gibbon before admitted. Their averſion to war, and to the magiſtracy, aroſe, I apprehend, from the moſt conſcientious motives. Idolatry was ſo interwoven in both theſe, that every day they muſt have violated what they held moſt ſacred, and contracted the deepeſt guilt, if they ſubmitted to bear a part in either. Their paſſive-

neſs

neſs aroſe from the nobleſt motives; but I no where diſcover the unlawfulneſs of defending their country againſt barbarians, as either taught in the bible, or pleaded for by any Chriſtian; if the horrible crime of idolatry had not been included in all military ſervice. The very oath, the enſigns, the images that reared their heads in every legion, forbad the poſſibility of their becoming ſoldiers. It were better for them to ſuffer any thing, than to ſin. To men of no conſcience this may be treated as a ridiculous ſcruple. They are not the proper judges. The *ambiguous anſwers* they are ſaid to have returned to their revilers, ſhew that they did not diſclaim *all* ſelf-defence; but that there were circumſtances which, as the Roman armies were then regulated, precluded their ſervice. It was ſufficient, without ſuggeſting another reaſon, that they dared not worſhip a falſe God, nor even appear to do ſo.

10. It is not true, that *the ambition of being raiſed to the honours and offices of the Church*, was the principle which animated the zeal of the primitive Chriſtians. It would, indeed, be contrary to

to the experience of all mankind before, that men ſhould affect ſituations, where the labour was great, the danger of the moſt imminent kind, the earthly advantage none, and themſelves treated, at leaſt by all the wiſe and great, as the moſt contemptible and deſpicable of beings. If men were goaded by ambition, this ſeems a ſtrange mode of gratifying their *active paſſions:* when ſo many nobler objects preſented themſelves to thoſe who aſpired to greatneſs; and eſpecially to men endued with ſuch ſingular talents, as Mr. Gibbon aſcribes to them, of "*eloquence, firmneſs, knowledge of man-*"*kind, and dexterity in buſineſs.*" It is ſingular enough, that the wiſe hiſtorian ſhould ſuppoſe himſelf better acquainted *with the ſecret motive of their actions,* than theſe good men themſelves. It would indeed be an uncommon phenomenon, that ambitious candidates for diſtinction, and minds ſo nobly furniſhed, ſhould prefer poverty, abuſe, contempt, and ſufferings of every kind, to which they knew themſelves as paſtors to be expoſed in a more eminent manner, for the ſake of an influence and dominion to be acquired and maintained

over

over a few deſpicable followers, in the loweſt rank of life, and upon whoſe approbation and choice all their pre-eminence confeſſedly depended: and this in dereliction of all the advantageous proſpects which offered themſelves in the world around them, where ſuch talents could hardly fail in ſecuring the natural objects of ambition. A man who wiſhes me to believe this, has a right to ridicule my credulity, if I could receive ſuch ſelf-evident contradictions.

Yet where no immediate bias to diſtort the truth of facts, in order to ſupport the cauſe of infidelity, leaves him an impartial witneſs, I will quote Gibbon with pleaſure. I am conſcious his authority is more likely to weigh with the world in general, than mine. I will therefore ſimply report his account of the government and nature of the primitive Church. I think we ſhall not in this point greatly differ. Hear the hiſtorian.

"The apoſtles declined the office of legiſlation, "reſpecting any form of Church government, "leaving

"leaving the Chriſtians of every future age, the "liberty of varying it, according to the changes "of time and circumſtances."

"The ſocieties inſtituted through the Roman "empire were united only by the ties of faith and "charity. Independence and equality formed the "baſis of their internal regulation."

"The public functions of religion were en- "truſted with the *biſhops* and *preſbyters*; two ap- "pellations which, in their origin, diſtinguiſhed "the ſame office, and the ſame order of perſons. "The name *preſbyter* was expreſſive of their age, "or rather of their gravity and wiſdom. The title "of *biſhop* denoted their inſpection over the faith "and manners of the Chriſtians, under their paſ- "toral care. In proportion to the reſpective num- "ber of the faithful, a larger or ſmaller number "of theſe *epiſcopal preſbyters* guided each infant "congregation with equal authority, and with "united counſels."

"The moſt perfect equality of freedom requires "a ſuperior magiſtrate: to maintain order in pub- "lic deliberations, &c. This led to chuſe one of "the wiſeſt among their preſbyters to execute, "during his life, the duties of their eccleſiaſtical "governor. It was under theſe circumſtances, "that the lofty title of biſhop began to raiſe itſelf "above the humble appellation of preſbyter."— "Epiſcopal government appears to have been in- "troduced before the end of the firſt century."— "The pious and humble preſbyters, firſt diſtin- "guiſhed by the epiſcopal title, could not poſſeſs, "would probably have rejected, the power and "pomp which now encircles the mitre."

"Their juriſdiction conſiſted in the adminiſ- "tration of the ſacraments, the diſcipline of the "Church, the worſhip, ordination of miniſters, to "whom the biſhop aſſigned their reſpective func- "tions, the management of the public fund, and "the determination of differences, &c."

"Theſe powers, during a ſhort period, were "exerciſed according to the advice of the preſby- "terial

" terial college, and with the conſent and appro-
" bation of the whole aſſembly of Chriſtians. The
" primitive biſhops were conſidered only as the
" firſt of their equals, and the honourable ſervants
" of a free people. At his death another was
" choſen among the preſbyters, by the ſuffrage of
" the whole congregation."

" Such was the equal conſtitution by which the
" Chriſtians were governed more than a hundred
" years, after the death of the apoſtles."

The abuſes which gradually changed this ſimplicity into a lordly hierarchy, and a worldly ſanctuary, have been already detailed, and need not be repeated.

The following juſt deſcription of the pagan world cannot be read without application to more modern days, and ſhews with what rapid ſtrides we are returning to the good old paths of atheiſm. " The faſhion of incredulity was communicated
" from the philoſopher to the man of pleaſure or
" buſineſs, from the noble to the plebeian, from

" the maſter to the menial who waited at his table,
" and who eagerly liſtened to the freedom of his
' converſation."

Though it is a matter of little importance, yet I cannot comprehend how it is poſſible, at the acceſſion of Conſtantine, that the Chriſtians were, as Mr. Gibbon affirms, ſcarce a twentieth part of the Roman empire. That men in no warlike habits; in no power, comparatively; excluded for the moſt part from the army and magiſtracy; deſtitute of philoſophic influence, and the friendſhip of the great and noble, and *not a twentieth* in number; ſhould become the dominant party, would be indeed an event remarkably ſingular.

To the imputation of *ignorance* and *obſcurity*, caſt on the firſt teachers of the Goſpel, and their contraſt with the noble philoſophic tribe of Seneca, Pliny, Tacitus, Marcus Antoninus, and the reſt, *whoſe days were ſpent in the purſuit of truth, and the practice of virtue:* I muſt demur. It is among the wonderful phenomena, which it would exerciſe the ingenuity of the hiſtorian to account for,

for, how men *unable to produce a ſingle argument, that could engage the attention of men of ſenſe and learning*, effected ſuch wonderful changes by their ignorance, as all theſe wiſe men were unable to work, and impotent to counteract. The truth is, the ignorance on the one hand, and the wiſdom on the other will not be found ſo profound as is inſinuated.

Men with the revelation of God in their hands, and the teacher of all truth in their hearts, with diligence of inquiry and purity of conduct, were, admitting them on a level in underſtanding with their fellows, neither to be concluded ſo ignorant, or ſo deſpicable as theſe wiſe philoſophers are pleaſed to imagine. And if we examine the records we have of theſe ſages, a Chriſtian, whatever Mr. Gibbon may do, will hardly admit their claim to *truth* in *theory*, or to *virtue* in *practice*. If therefore theſe pagan eminences are produced to caſt a ſhade of deriſion on the contemptible attainments of the poor Chriſtians, I apprehend, on a fair compariſon of their *principles*, and their *conduct* that the meaneſt of true Chriſtians, whilſt renounc-

ing *all merit*, will be found in the ſcale of real excellence, infinitely ſuperior to the proudeſt philoſopher.

To the attack on prophecy and miracles, I ſhall not reply; this having been already done by ſo many able advocates. I would only obſerve, that all the frauds and lying miracles confeſſedly multiplied in an early ſtage of the Church after the apoſtles' days, will not weaken the evidence of revealed truth. After all attempts to undermine the prophecies, and to bring into ſuſpicion the facts recorded by Chriſt, and his apoſtles, the more they are examined, the more they will continue to baffle the ſuggeſtions of the moſt ingenious ſcepticiſm. Should the fathers be proved either credulous or miſtaken, that would not at all alter the foundation of God's word, which ſtandeth ſure. When I ſee what cannot be controverted—men of common underſtanding; to ſay no more—multitudes—dying in torment and ignominy, in ſupport of a fact which they aſſert to be true, and of which they were capable judges—and had every poſſible motive to engage them to be certain, and

not

not miſtaken—the tenor of whoſe lives always expreſſed the moſt unimpeached integrity.—To ſuppoſe ſuch an army of martyrs dying in the defence of a fact, ſuch as the reſurrection of Chriſt, which they knew to be falſe, and knowing and avowing that ſuch falſehood muſt enſure their own everlaſting miſery—ſo that their proſpects in an eternal world muſt be as terrible as their torments in this were agonizing—to ſupport ſuch a ſuppoſition, a man muſt believe a great deal more than I do.

What Mr. Gibbon *is ſo much at a loſs to diſcover* in the firſt paragraph of the 16th chapter of his hiſtory, every Chriſtian who is acquainted with the native corruption of the human heart can eaſily explain to him—the pride of wiſdom and human excellence muſt be exaſperated by a religion that pours equal contempt on both: and the higher men ſtood on theſe, the more bitter would be their enmity againſt Chriſtianity. The wanton cruelty of a Nero might delight in ſome atrocious maſſacre; but the inſulted pride of the cold-blooded philoſophic heart of a Trajan or a Pliny, could more ſyſtematically perſecute.

It is ſaid, "could it be poſſible that a Roman "ſhould perſecute a ſect, whilſt it allowed the "Jewiſh nation liberty, from whence ſuch ſect "was ſuppoſed to ſpring? What could it be to "them into how many ſects the Jews were di-"vided?" The anſwer is evident. The cauſe of perſecution had a quite different origin. The lives of Chriſtians made them as obnoxious to Jews as to Pagans. It was not merely in the point of idolatrous worſhip, that they alike reſiſted. This might have brought little perſecution upon them, if the whole of their converſation had not teſtified of the world that its deeds were evil. Their active efforts to turn men from darkneſs unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, awakened enmity againſt them, and brought down upon them the heavy hand of power. Could they have kept their religion to themſelves, and pleaded they were merely a Jewiſh ſect, they would probably have eaſily eſcaped perſecution.

"Their gloomy and auſtere aſpect, their abhor-"rence of the common buſineſs, and pleaſures of "life," &c. To the two latter charges an anſwer has

has been given; to the former, as it is a modern as well as ancient accuſation, I ſhall juſt reply, that ſuch an accuſation carries the face of prejudice rather than truth. Their aſpect bore a ſerene, and ſacred pleaſure. Their agapæ we know were celebrated with joy and ſingleneſs of heart: their worſhip with ſongs of delight and gladneſs; even in flames they died happy and triumphant. I can trace nothing gloomy in theſe evidences. The ſame is ſaid of *real Chriſtians* at preſent, and with juſt as much truth; becauſe they refuſe to join the riotous mirth, which is madneſs, and to mingle with the throng of folly, they are moroſe, melancholy; their brethren and companions form a different opinion of them, and will tell you that they "*rejoice always.*"

It is remarkable, that ſome of the ſame ſtories, of "the lights extinguiſhed," and the impure connections of the preſent real Chriſtian ſocieties, are reported now, as Minutius Felix records in his day as the ſlander of the heathen, and with the ſame truth.

To

To be ſure it is an excellent apology for perſecuting pagan emperors, that a Charles V, or a Philip, or a Lewis the XIVth, were more inhuman, and more inexcuſable. Will the wickedneſs of modern ſovereigns juſtify the cruelty or injuſtice of the ancient?

It is not true, that in *the infancy of the Church* it was concealed, as a Jewiſh ſect from perſecutions. Whoever reads the Acts of the Apoſtles will ſee, that from the moment of its birth it ſuffered as ſeverely from the Jews, as it afterwards did from the Romans. Paul and his aſſociates afford examples of threatening and ſlaughter, and priſons, afterwards ſharply retorted upon himſelf. The ſuggeſtions offered to ſoften down and palliate the ſufferings of the faithful, appear as untrue as the intention of the hiſtorian is evidently diſingenuous.

Mr. Gibbon ſays, as "an accurate enquirer, he is "induced to doubt, whether any of thoſe perſons "who had been witneſſes of the miracles of Chriſt, "were permitted beyond the limits of Paleſtine, "to ſeal with their blood their teſtimony."

The

The materials are confeſſedly ſcanty which report theſe ſufferings; Clemens mentions the martyrdom of Peter, and tradition of others. That the heathen authors have not condeſcended to take notice of any martyrs, is a very indifferent negative proof that there were none. They hardly took notice that ſuch a body of people as Chriſtians exiſted: but of the thouſands who were ſpectators of our Lord's miracles, many of whom went out, we are aſſured, preaching *every where*, it would be a ſingular event indeed, conſidering the ſtate and temper of thoſe with whom they had to do, Jewiſh zealots, and a Pagan prieſthood and magiſtracy, if they who muſt be the moſt offenſive objects, eſcaped the arm of the perſecutor. The ſacred writings aſſure us, that in every place bonds and impriſonments awaited them—that the life of an Evangeliſt muſt not be dear to himſelf —ready to be offered on the ſervice of the faith—and to die for the name of the Lord Jeſus. And the fact is evident, not only in the death of Stephen and James, and the havock and ſlaughter made by Paul in the other cities beſides Jeruſalem: but in the ſufferings of many who are expreſsly mentioned.

mentioned. Silas, Epaphras, Ariſtarchus, Andronicus, Junia, and others, were all in chains with the great Apoſtle, and ready to lay down their lives; nor is it poſſible in the nature of man, but that offended pride, and mortified paſſion, unable to ſtay the current of the riſing religion of Jeſus, ſhould rage againſt it. We know, from the unqueſtionable authority of Tacitus, "that they "were branded with deſerved infamy," "a miſ-"chievous ſect," "impure and atrocious," "de-"ſerving the moſt exemplary puniſhment," "con-"victed of the hatred of human kind," and equally hated by them. Now if this, as appears, was the general and prevailing opinion, reſpecting Chriſtians and their character, and every paſſion and prejudice of the human mind inflamed againſt them; the wiſe, the multitudes, the magiſtrates equally prepoſſeſſed againſt them; all power in the hands of their enemies; and no ability to reſiſt, or hope to be heard with candour—I wiſh Mr. Gibbon, or any other infidel, to ſay, whether the ſufferings of Chriſtians in ſuch a caſe muſt not have been many and great. Though they may reject St. Paul, they will admit the evidence of Tacitus.

Men

Men convicted of hatred of all mankind, and expoſed to equal hatred from them, could not but be expoſed to death in every cruel attitude; nor was this ought but what they expected and prepared for. Their maſter had long before told them they ſhould be hated of all men for his name-ſake; and that, without being ready to lay down their lives for him and his truth, they could not be his diſciples. I am a believer in prophecy. I am perſuaded it was exactly fulfilled in the experience of the faithful witneſſes from the beginning; and that it was a reality, which St. John relates of thoſe whom he beheld under the altar, who had been ſlain for the teſtimony of Jeſus.

Long before the perſecution of Nero, the ſame grounds evidently ſubſiſted, and could not but produce their natural effects.

That a dreadful perſecution raged under Nero at Rome, will not be diſputed. Hear Tacitus, and Gibbon, his tranſlator—"A great multitude were "all convicted, and died in torments; and theſe "torments embittered by inſult and deriſion. Some

"were

" were nailed on croſſes, others ſewn up in the " ſkins of wild beaſts, and expoſed to the fury of " dogs; others again ſmeared over with combuſ- " tible materials, and uſed as torches, to illumine " the darkneſs of the night." The blood freezes at theſe horrors; but the hiſtorian, however partial to Tacitus, is diſpoſed to ſoften matters, and queſtion the exactitude of the Roman, though probably he was himſelf the ſpectator of the ſcene, which he deſcribes. In fact, it is impoſſible, if the report of Tacitus be true, but that the ſuggeſtions of Mr. Gibbon muſt be falſe. Nero had never thus wreaked his fury upon Chriſtians, if they had not previouſly, in the higheſt manner become obnoxious; and this muſt have ariſen from ſome long continued cauſe, exciting this general *hatred of mankind*, and *public abhorrence*, againſt a *miſchievous ſect, impure, atrocious*; whoſe *execrable ſuperſtition and guilt, deſerved the moſt exemplary puniſhment*. He muſt be pretty determinedly incredulous, who knowing any thing of human nature, and eſpecially its bigotry and pride in religious matters, can ſurvey proud philoſophers, fanatic prieſts, inhuman and rapacious governors, and a

ſavage

ſavage populace, and not acknowledge under ſuch circumſtances, how many the victims muſt be to hatred, envy, jealouſy, pride, and covetouſneſs.

Mr. Gibbon, I apprehend, muſt be greatly miſtaken in ſuppoſing the Chriſtians an *obſcure body* in the time of Nero, and aſſigning his reaſons why the Jews, though ſo much more numerous, were not the objects of vengeance—neither of which can be true. The *immenſe multitude who were executed*, evidences they could not be an inconſiderable body, or very obſcure; and no other reaſon need be aſſigned for their obnoxiouſneſs than the real one, their holy lives; and their zeal for Chriſt and his Goſpel; theſe awakened that enmity to which the Jew gave no provocation.

Nor can I imagine it at all probable, that ſuch perſecution was confined to the walls of Rome. Would a people under the characters above deſcribed, and equally or more numerous without the walls, meet with leſs abhorrence and cruelty? When the head of the empire ſet ſuch an example, would the Roman magiſtrates be compaſſionate?

With

With ſuch edicts, calling for the ſword, would it ſlumber in the ſcabbard? Would there be none glad to ſeize the occaſion of gratifying to the full, their enmities, their bigotry, or their rapaciouſneſs? Would not many deſire to recommend themſelves to the Emperor, by praiſing his zeal, and imitating his example? I muſt be very infidel indeed, if I could doubt ſo natural a concluſion.

"That the religious tenets of Chriſtians were "never made the ſubject of puniſhment, or even of "enquiry," is ſo far from being "*evident*," that I apprehend, if the evidence of Tacitus himſelf be true, this concluſion muſt be falſe.

I might farther appeal to Pliny's letter, and Trajan's anſwer, and the obſervations before made, for a refutation of all the ſoftenings of the elegant hiſtorian. It was impoſſible, under ſuch circumſtances, but that Chriſtians muſt ſuffer, and ſuffer greatly. The idea of the backwardneſs of accuſers, though egged on by every motive that could rouſe the human paſſions, and with the addition of ſuperſtition, as doing an act of piety to their gods, will

will hardly be admitted by any man of candor and deep knowledge of the human heart. The hiſtorian's partiality, with all his artful inſinuations, betrays him, and diſappoints his purpoſes.

The conſtant and frequently returning abominable public games, and theatrical ſhows, afforded occaſion to the populace, inſtigated by ſophiſts and prieſtcraft, for venting their rage on the hated ſect of Galileans, who condemned and abhorred theſe practices. The very edicts of Hadrian and Pius, appealed to as diſcouraging ſuch tumultuous proceedings, are a proof of their frequency and atrocity.

Mr. Gibbon's commendation of the humanity and mildneſs of the Roman governors, is truly aſtoniſhing. When the humane Trajan approves the atrocious acts of the learned Pliny, in putting thoſe inſtantly to death who confeſſed themſelves Chriſtians, and extending innocent damſels on the rack, merely to extort from them accuſations of their brethren; and when other governors, after the gentle trial what torture might produce in Africa, found themſelves foiled by the conſtancy

of the ſufferers, they very humanely, inſtead of putting them all to death, contented themſelves with "*the milder chaſtiſements of impriſonments, exile, "ſlavery, or digging in the mines*;" and as a concluſive proof, he mentions that Cyprian was not tortured, but *only beheaded.* If ſuch is the boaſted humanity of Mr. Gibbon and his philoſophic aſſociates, we may truly ſay, their tender mercies are cruel.

That the *number* of martyrs was *inconſiderable*, is not true; and, according to the evidence adduced, impoſſible that it ſhould be ſo. Admitting even of the multitude of the accuſed, that a few victims only were ſelected, excluſive of more general maſſacres, yet theſe collectively, through the extent of the Roman empire, muſt be a great multitude, whom no man can number, who loved not their lives unto death, and form a truly noble army of martyrs.

There is an unfairneſs in miſrepreſenting the principles of Cyprian, unworthy a candid hiſtorian, and which only averſion to Chriſtianity could produce. Why baſely impute to avarice, or ambition the manly fortitude he is admitted to have diſplayed?

ed? Why ſuppoſe him the reverſe of all his former liberalities? Why endeavour to leſſen his deſerved praiſe by a long ſtring of ſuggeſted motives, which probably never entered into the martyr's idea? Let infidelity ſupport her cauſe fairly. Theſe ſuggeſtions cannot give credit to her defenders.

To a true believer it can afford no matter of ſurpriſe, that philoſophers expreſſed their aſtoniſhment at the fortitude of ſuffering Chriſtians, whilſt their cold hearts yet hardened, received no conviction from that readineſs to ſeal their teſtimony by their blood, which perſons of all ranks, ages, and ſexes diſplayed. "The ſober diſcretion of modern Chriſ-"tianity is indeed as far from imitating, or being "ready to ſuffer, as modern infidelity, and ancient "philoſophy, to admire ſuch examples." Such Chriſtians as the hiſtorian ever knew, and conſorted with him, I will admit come under the title of ſober diſcretioniſts: but there is an exiſting race of a different kind, now as of old, beneath the admiration of the philoſophers, and ready to lay down their lives for Chriſt, and his truth. There may be another philoſophic ſtruggle to deſtroy Chriſtianity, and as cruel, and as impotent as the paſt.

Another ſtrong contradiction to the hiſtorian's aſſertion of the ſmall number of the perſecuted and martyrs, will be evident in the immenſe multitude of the lapſed, whom torture, or dread of ſufferings and death had led to abjure their profeſſion. When to abjure, or periſh was the only alternative, it will be difficult to vindicate the humanity of the perſecutors, or in the immenſity of criminals impeached to ſuppoſe that a few only dared to die. They who are acquainted with the ſpirit of a Chriſtian will not doubt, that for Chriſt many, very many, were found ready to ſeal their teſtimony with their blood.

What the exact number of the martyrs amounted to, and how many perſecutions aroſe, whether ten, or ten thouſand, which conſidering the vaſtneſs of the Roman Empire, is far more probable, theſe are of little import to be aſcertained. Their ſufferings were evidently great, and the martyrs many. Nor do I attribute with the hiſtorian, the intervals of repoſe which the Church enjoyed ſo much to the *indifference of ſome princes, or to the indulgence of others*, as to the troubled ſtate of the Roman Empire, which engaged the lords of the world in the purſuits

purſuits of their ambition, and the murdering one another; leaving the Chriſtian matters to ſleep, till a time of peace and ſettlement gave freer ſcope for deliberate civil executions; and to plunder the Chriſtians, when the contending parties ceaſed to have the confiſcations of their opponents.

Though I place no great ſtreſs upon Tertullian, yet his apologies, if ſo fabulous, as Mr. Gibbon inſinuates, would have been eaſily confuted, and as the events to which he refers were recent if convicted of falſehood, he muſt have blaſted and injured in the moſt ſenſible manner, the cauſe he had undertaken to defend. He refers to matters of fact, which however ſcepticiſm may doubt or diſpute now, his pagan adverſaries had then the eaſieſt means to detect and diſprove, and *they* were not in acuteneſs or malignity much inferior to any modern infidel.

"The ſingular fatality," at which Mr. Gibbon ſeems ſurpriſed, in the different conduct of princes of ſo very different characters, towards the Chriſtians, is to thoſe who are acquainted with the corruption of the human heart, not difficult to be accounted

counted for. The unworthineſs of their protectreſs Marcia under Commodus, is no more ſtrange than in many inſtances hath been obſervable, when through the good providence of God, deliverance has been afforded his people from the moſt unlooked for means, and the moſt unholy inſtruments. Beſides, a real Chriſtian has always more to apprehend from a Trajan, and an Antonine, than from a Severus, and a Caracalla. The inſolence of philoſophic pride, is more offended with the Chriſtian graces, than the depths of profligacy are, and perſecutes with more envenomed aſperity. The *virtuous Decius*, was among the moſt bloody murderers of the innocent. Mr. Gibbon wiſhes to be his apologiſt, and ſuggeſts his deep penetration, which ſuſpecting danger from the conſequences of the Chriſtian character, led him to prevent it, by diſabling them from miſchief. Though the falſehood of theſe ſuſpicions is demonſtrated in the patient paſſive ſufferings of ſo immenſe a multitude.

The perſecution of Diocleſian raged for ten years ſucceſſively through the Roman Empire. In ſuch a wide ſpreading deſolation it was impoſſible, but that, as we have ſeen, the blood of martyrs ſhould

flow

flow in rivers. The hiſtorian himſelf gives a looſe to his pen, and paints a ſcene, the horrors of which are inexpreſſible. Yet is his art employed to diminiſh the number of the ſufferers. Whilſt a Duke of Alva, in after ages is charged with the murder of an hundred thouſand proteſtants, in one inconſiderable diſtrict, by the moſt unexceptionable teſtimony: Diocleſian, Galerius, Maximian, all conſulting about the abolition of Chriſtianity, and ſetting their whole force and craft to diſcover and deſtroy an unreſiſting people, throughout the whole extent of their vaſt empire, during ten years unceaſing perſecution only murdered *two thouſand.* Had they leſs enmity or ability to deſtroy than Alva, or Philip? Or fewer objects on which to wreak their vengeance? I appeal to hiſtory, and the nature of man.

That Chriſtianity ſurvived all its ſufferings—foiled the malice of perſecutors—and ſtood its ground amidſt the cowardice of apoſtates—That not only without human aid of any kind, but with all the power, wealth, wiſdom, of ſuch an empire combined againſt them, for three hundred years, a few poor, illiterate, inconſiderable, perſons commenced,

menced, and maintained with growing ſucceſs, amidſt every ſuffering which diabolical malice could inflict, an attack againſt the eſtabliſhed idolatries, and the deeper rooted prejudices and pride of man—That though every where objects of contempt and deteſtation, they perſevered, and prevailed in a cauſe apparently the moſt deſperate; and in adoration of a perſon the moſt deſpicable, and admitted to be crucified as a maleſactor; and erected the triumphant banners of the Croſs, over all the idols of paganiſm, and the proud boaſtings of philoſophy—This is ſuch a living miracle, ſuch an abiding proof of the divine authority, which ſent, and the divine energy which attended the miniſtration of the Goſpel, that infidels, who can themſelves believe, and would perſuade others, that this was a natural courſe of human events, diſplay a credulity unſpeakably greater, than any which they affect to deſpiſe and ridicule in the votaries of revelation.

END OF VOL. I.

SM 95 55